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# Forgotten Russian Piano Music: the Sonatas of Anatoly Aleksandrov

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FORGOTTEN RUSSIAN PIANO MUSIC:  
THE SONATAS OF ANATOLY ALEKSANDROV

by

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## ABSTRACT

This historical and analytical study focuses on the piano sonatas of Anatoly Aleksandrov (1888-1982), the longest-living Russian and Soviet composer-pianist of the twentieth century. The fourteen piano sonatas, written between 1922 and 1971, reflect not only the composer's evolution of style, but also reveal the vast array of influences which characterize the music of the twentieth century. Chromaticism that resulted from stretched harmonic sequences, strong melodic lyricism that threads these epic compositions, rich writing for piano, and hints of Russian folklore all contribute to the composer's original style, which synthesizes Aleksandrov's four main figures of influence, namely Rachmaninov, Scriabin, Medtner, and Feinberg.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

Nineteenth-century Romanticism was a thriving ground for the genre of solo piano music. Its development over several decades affected not only European composers, but also musical culture around the world, including that of slowly growing Russia. Influenced by Chopin and Liszt, many Russian composers offered a significant contribution to the piano literature. Though mostly associated with such prominent individuals as Rachmaninov, Scriabin, and Prokofiev, the output of Russian solo piano music abounds with lesser-known names of composers who created interesting and appealing repertoire during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Some composers, such as Arensky, Rubinstein, or Glazunov, continued the development of the Tchaikovsky style, while others followed the tradition of Russian nationalism fathered by Glinka and Dargomizsky. Among the latter were Liapunov and Lyadov, as well as the members of the “Mighty Handful,” including Balakirev, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Musorgsky, and Cui.

After the genre climaxed in the works of Rachmaninov and Scriabin by the end of the nineteenth century, the subsequent three decades presented an even more vibrant scene in Russian piano music. Largely influenced by socio-historical and cultural changes, it resulted in piano compositions that reflected the most unusual stylistic amalgamation. Influenced by the styles of Rachmaninov and Scriabin, many talented composers of that time developed new sonorities and compositional approaches in their

works, combining Russian sentimental style rooted in the folk-singing tradition with such modern musical developments as expressionism and impressionism. Among such composers were Alexander Krein, Vladimir Rebikov, Vladimir Shcherbachev, Alexei Stanchinsky, and Anatoly Aleksandrov. Although they did not achieve the kind of monumental fame as did the above-mentioned Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, or Shostakovich, their music remains a well-crafted, innovative, and valuable treasure in the history of the Russian piano music.

The piano works of Anatoly Nikolaevich Aleksandrov (1888-1982) exemplify the complex stylistic development of the genre from the pre-revolutionary time and through the Soviet period until the early 1980s. They not only show how cultural and the political conditions affected the art of music during Russia's turbulent first decades of the twentieth century, but also offer insight into Aleksandrov's individual style, as well as its place within the vibrant palette of contemporary piano music.

During his extensive life span, the longest among Russian composer-pianists, Aleksandrov created a significant amount of music for piano, including fourteen sonatas. Having achieved initial success through his operas and vocal works, he soon found his way to being recognized as one of the most famous piano music composers in Soviet Russia. Although Aleksandrov's works were not well-known outside of Russia, his piano compositions received considerable attention at home and were frequently incorporated in the repertoire of performing artists, especially during the 1920s. In 1927, Aleksandrov was acknowledged by the well-known Russian musicologist and composer Leonid Sabaneyev, who included in his survey of Russia's young modern composers Yevseyeff, Polovinkin, Knipper, Shirinsky, Shebalin, and several others, that Aleksandrov "must be

recognized as the most prominent of this group.”<sup>1</sup> Sabaneyev also denoted that Aleksandrov was “an unquestionable master of style and wields the technique of composition perfectly.”<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising that Aleksandrov’s works written before 1930s captured Sabaneyev’s attention; these compositions are indeed distinguished by the most creative treatment of the various stylistic elements, best-crafted structural solutions, and the most original musical content.

Although highly imaginative, Aleksandrov’s music does not escape the influence of the most prominent composers of piano music at the turn of the twentieth century. In his autobiography the composer reveals the origins of his musical roots by stating, “My aesthetic ideals came from two different sources; one came from Taneyev, who was very conservative, and the other from his student Zhilyaev, who raised me with Scriabin and Debussy, as well as convincing me that the contemporary work of an artist must open new horizons. . . . However, only after the contact with Medtner did I finally form my ideals.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Aleksandrov realized the effect of contemporary composers, especially Scriabin and Medtner, on his music.

Observation of style in Aleksandrov’s work presents an interesting phenomenon. Not pursuing the development of modern elements, nor rejecting the world of musical innovation, Aleksandrov carefully selected various contemporary musical elements for his compositions, as long as they conformed to the broader conception of his work. As a result, his music represents a fusion of almost all existing trends, including Scriabin’s

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<sup>1</sup> Leonid Leonidovich Sabaneyev, *Modern Russian Composers*, Da Capo Press Music Reprint Series (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 233.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Blok and Elena Polenova, eds., *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva* (Moskva: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1990), 9. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

mysticism and harmony, Rachmaninov's lyricism and nostalgia, Feinberg's idiomatic piano style, and Medtner's epic narrative. In addition, Aleksandrov's own skills in piano performance, distinguished by superb technique combined with subtle, nuanced tone and lyric expression, enabled him to write his piano works with keen understanding of instrument's possibilities. This links him even closer to his four major figures of influence – Rachmaninov, Scriabin, Medtner, and Feinberg.

Aleksandrov's piano compositions after the 1930s in part continue the stylistic traits of the earlier works; however, they also present several new elements. The stricter political controls of art policies inflicted by Soviet authorities caused many contemporary composers to adjust their style. Consequently, Aleksandrov's work of that time contains more frequent examples of music written for official Soviet occasions. The effects of the political situation are also reflected in Aleksandrov's musical language, which includes noticeably fewer modern elements and the increased use of national elements, such as folk and popular songs from different republics of the U.S.S.R.

Despite a relatively successful career during his lifetime, Aleksandrov's name became forgotten after 1990, and his music practically vanished from the performers' repertoire. The examination of possible flaws and problems in Aleksandrov's style raises many questions concerning the expressive nature of his music and the extent of its originality, as well as the influence of political events. A few researchers suggest the reasons for the disappearance of Aleksandrov's music. Christoph Flamm, for instance, notes the indecisiveness in Aleksandrov's style and his emotionally reserved writing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Blume, ed. *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Kassel; New York: Bärenreiter, 1999), s.v. "Aleksandrov, Anatolii," by Christoph Flamm, 431.

Sabaneyev, too, points out “a certain anemia, the absence of ardent pathos, the rationality of his work, which is neither cold nor hot but lukewarm.”<sup>5</sup> These statements seem contradictory to the numerous complimentary reviews from the 1920s and 1930s that praise the composer’s immense talent, originality, and great emotional power. What causes such a discrepancy? Have the audiences and musical conditions changed in our time? Or is there indeed a fundamental flaw in the work of the composer? The answers to these questions would not only help the reader to understand the true value of Aleksandrov’s music but also shed light on the intriguing issue of the ability of one’s art to stand the test of time.

The study of Aleksandrov’s piano sonatas may be the key to finding answers to these questions. Through the deeper understanding of the circumstances where a creative artist works among an array of strong influences, chooses his individual stylistic direction, and solves many compositional problems, the study may bring one to the discovery of not only appealing musical material, but also shrewd technical solutions and creative musical language. Perhaps, in addition, one will find these works worthy of being part of the repertoire in contemporary piano performance.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study is to provide stylistic analysis of Anatoly Aleksandrov’s fourteen piano sonatas, while investigating their artistic and technical value in the spectrum of Russian piano music of the early twentieth century. Among various genres in Aleksandrov’s work, music for solo piano is the most substantial. The

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<sup>5</sup> Sabaneyev, *Modern Russian Composers*, 234.



composition of piano sonatas offers particular interest as it spans evenly throughout the composer's ninety-four years of life. Accordingly, the first sonata, op. 4, was composed in 1914, when Aleksandrov was twenty-six years old, and the last sonata, op. 97, was finished in 1971, eleven years before his death. The analysis of these sonatas reveals the evolution of Aleksandrov's compositional style, which was formed under the influence of important historical, political, and musical events in Soviet Russia. In addition, the study aims to uncover the hidden wealth of potentially valuable piano repertoire, which performers may find worth reviving.

### Methodology

In order to achieve the most comprehensive understanding of Anatoly Aleksandrov's work, the study covers several essential areas. They include the composer's biographical information that focuses on his education and career, the historic cultural and political situations in the development of the Soviet music, including the pre-revolutionary stage before 1917, the exploration of Aleksandrov's major musical influences that led to the formation of his style, and finally, the presentation of his piano sonatas.

The analysis of each work focuses on stylistic examination, which includes the discussion of the formal developments, thematic treatment, melodic structure, harmonic language, and pianistic writing. Brief descriptions of historical and biographical background are provided for specific sonatas. Additionally, the discussion is supplemented with the review of each work's critical reception by contemporary and modern musicologists, as well as general suggestions for interpretation.

Based on the analytical presentation of the fourteen sonatas, the study then thoroughly examines the general aspects of Aleksandrov's style, summarizing the effects of historical and biographical conditions, as well as the composer's personality and his philosophical outlook. Finally, in the search for possible limitations in Aleksandrov's music, the study attempts to resolve the issue of the composer's diminished popularity.

### Justification

Widely popular among Soviet piano soloists in the 1920s, Aleksandrov's piano sonatas today scarcely remain in the repertoire of Russian pianists. Throughout Western countries his music is hardly known by most musicians. During the most recent decades, however, the interest in Russian music of the Soviet time has increased dramatically.

Many researchers call for the need of studying the musical art of the early Soviet Russia. Among such researchers is David Fanning, who states in the *Musical Times*, "Russian modernism remains a fascinating and little-known chapter in the history of this century's music, and one which offers rich picking for the analyst."<sup>6</sup> Christoph Flamm points out the political element as the reason for lack of study in this area when he writes, "Musicologists have until now limited their interest in the Soviet period almost exclusively to the avant-garde composers (often only supposedly avant-garde), to artists who were discriminated against and forced to emigrate..."<sup>7</sup> Larry Sitsky writes in similar

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<sup>6</sup> David Fanning, review of *Modernism in Russian Piano Music: Skriabin, Prokofiev, and Their Russian Contemporaries*, Peter Deane Roberts, *The Musical Times*, 134, no. 1810 (December 1993): 703.

<sup>7</sup> Christoph Flamm, Liner Notes, *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hamish Milne (piano), Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc.

vein, as evident from his studies where he aims to raise the awareness of many “forgotten” Russian composers and their “unaccountably neglected” music.<sup>8</sup>

Considering the significance and high reputation of Aleksandrov’s compositions during the 1920s and 1930s, it is evident that his art played a substantial role in the development of Soviet music. Thus, the study of Aleksandrov’s work significantly contributes to the further understanding of style in Russian music during its Soviet period.

### Literature Review

Presently, there are very few sources dedicated exclusively to the work of Anatoly Aleksandrov. Moreover, all major studies of his music have been conducted and published in the Russian language, although additional source material can be found in English and German.

The most comprehensive survey of Aleksandrov’s compositional output has been made by the Soviet musicologist Vladimir Kokushkin in his monograph *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, published in 1987. Kokushkin’s study focuses on the overview of the most important genres in Aleksandrov’s work, namely his vocal compositions, chamber music, piano works, music for theater, and operas. In addition, the author provides brief biographical information and offers insightful thoughts on the composer’s style.

Equally valuable are the two sources compiled and edited by Aleksandrov’s student Vladimir Blok and the composer’s daughter Elena Polenova. The first source, *A.*

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 199.

*N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, Stati, Pis'ma* [A. N. Aleksandrov: Recollections, Articles, Letters], edited by Vladimir Blok, was published in Moscow, in 1979, while the composer was still living. It presents a collection of important materials, such as fragments of Aleksandrov's autobiography, several letters, the composer's articles and reviews, and the recollections of Aleksandrov's students. In addition, the book gathers several reprinted journal articles dedicated to the research of Aleksandrov's music.

The second source, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz Zhizni i Tvorchestva* [A. N. Aleksandrov: Pages from Life and Work], commemorates the composer's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and was published in Moscow in 1990 under the editorship of Vladimir Blok and Elena Polenova. Continuing the goals of the first volume, this book further promotes Aleksandrov's compositional journey. Along with compiled articles dedicated to the study of separate compositions emphasizing the late works, it contains the composer's newly written recollections, letters, and colleagues' remembrances, as well as Aleksandrov's spoken thoughts on music transcribed from reel-to-reel recordings.

Aside from the three monographs listed above, there is invaluable reference material compiled by A. Ortenberg and titled *A. N. Aleksandrov: Notograficheski Spravochnik* [A. N. Aleksandrov: Reference of Written Compositions].<sup>9</sup> In this source the author presents the most comprehensive and detailed list of all compositions written by Aleksandrov before 1965, including published works and manuscripts. Organized in sections by opus numbers, genres, and manuscripts, the list is very practical and easy to follow. This volume also contains a suggested bibliography related to the composer.

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<sup>9</sup> A. Ortenberg, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Notograficheski spravochnik* (Moskva: Muzyka, 1965).

Of special interest is Victor Beliaev's book titled *Anatol Alexandrow*. Published in 1927 in Russian and German languages, it is the earliest study of the composer's work. In the short twenty-page length of this book the author is able to provide some biographical information, describe Aleksandrov's first six piano sonatas, and follow the composer's stylistic evolution. Though insightful as an example of the earliest critique regarding Aleksandrov's music, Beliaev's work is limited, as it only covers piano sonatas and vocal pieces written before 1927.

In addition to monographs, numerous articles are found in the Russian Soviet periodicals, mainly *Sovetskaya Muzyka* [Soviet Music] and the earlier published journal *K Novym Beregam* [To the New Shores]. The articles generally focus on separate compositions by Aleksandrov or on the recollections of his life events. Thus, they serve both analytical and biographical purposes.

Although not dedicated solely to the study of Aleksandrov's compositions, several sources in the English language contain useful information about the composer, his contemporaries, and the artistic environment during the first quarter of the twentieth century in Russia. Among these sources are the following studies: Leonid Sabaneyev's *Modern Russian Composers*, Larry Sitsky's *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900–1929*, and Peter Deane Roberts' two-volume work *Modernism in Russian Piano Music: Skriabin, Prokofiev, and Their Russian Contemporaries*.

The scores of Aleksandrov's first thirteen piano sonatas were published in Moscow in 1966 as the third volume of his complete piano music. The last sonata was published separately in 1973. Individual sonatas are also available in Universal Edition

(Wien-New York); the difference between the editions is insignificant, since the composer provided very detailed musical instructions in the manuscripts.

Aleksandrov's piano sonatas have been recorded mainly in the Soviet Union. Among older materials, the recordings of the Second, Tenth, and Eleventh Piano Sonatas are available on LP.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, British pianist Hamish Milne in London has released a CD of Aleksandrov's piano music, which includes the Third and the Fourth Piano Sonatas.<sup>11</sup> Another recording of the Second Sonata in the live performance by Yuri Martinov is available on a CD featuring rare piano music.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Anatoly Nikolaevich Aleksandrov, *Fortepiannye sonaty*, Moskva, Melodiya 33D-012202, 33 rpm, 196?.

<sup>11</sup> Anatoly Aleksandrov, *Piano Music of Anatoly Alexandrov*, performed by Hamish Milne, London, England: Hyperion Records Limited CDA67328, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> *Rarities of Piano Music at 'Schloss vor Husum,'* DANACORD, DACOCD 489, 1998, compact disc.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **BIOGRAPHY**

The life journey of Anatoly Aleksandrov could be a study in itself. The composer lived a long vivid life, filled with unique personal experiences, the pursuit of a successful career, and a constant search for the truth in art, as well as within himself. Having witnessed wars, experienced discrimination, and suffered serious illnesses and deaths of people close to him on one hand while participating in building a new culture and being rewarded for professional accomplishments on the other, Aleksandrov lived his life to its fullest. It consequently was not a surprise that in 1936 he started writing his memoirs, which today serve as the best source for obtaining information about his life.

Initially Aleksandrov's autobiography covered only the first eighteen years of his life,<sup>13</sup> though it contained extremely detailed information about his childhood, a very special time in his life, as is discussed in Part I. Although Aleksandrov's autobiography was never published in its entirety, fragments can be found in a book compiled by the composer and Aleksandrov's student Vladimir Blok and Aleksandrov's daughter Elena Polenova in 1979. Eleven years later, in honor of the composer's centennial, the same authors compiled another book of materials in which Aleksandrov's new, earlier unpublished autobiographical recollections appear. Unlike previous memoirs, these

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<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Blok, ed., *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma* (Moskva: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1979), 6.

reflect on the composer's adult life.<sup>14</sup> In addition, this source provides unique material: The reproduced stories and thoughts on music that were verbally told by Aleksandrov and tape recorded. To this day the two books remain the only sources containing autobiographical information about Aleksandrov.

Aside from Aleksandrov's autobiography, there is voluminous correspondence between the composer and his family members, colleagues, students, and friends that includes valuable biographical information.<sup>15</sup> Some information is also published in the form of articles and memoirs written by people who closely lived and worked with Aleksandrov. The unpublished materials remain in the family archive at the composer's apartment in Moscow, as well as other archives, such as the Central State Archive of Art and Literature and Moscow Conservatory Archive.<sup>16</sup>

### Part I: Childhood

Born in Moscow on May 25<sup>th</sup> (May 13<sup>th</sup> according to the old calendar), 1888, Anatoly Nikolayevich Aleksandrov remembered music surrounding his life from the very beginning. In his autobiography he writes, "No matter how far back into the past I go with my imagination, I don't recall a time when music was not in the background to the events of my childhood."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the composer's mother Anna Aleksandrova (maiden name Levenson) was a good pianist,<sup>18</sup> who concertized and taught private piano lessons

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<sup>14</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 9-115.

<sup>15</sup> These can be found in Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, Stati, Pis'ma*, and Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*.

<sup>16</sup> Vladimir Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov* (Moskva: Sovetskij Kompozitor, 1987), 6.

<sup>17</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Levenson graduated from Moscow conservatory, where she studied piano with Karl Klindworth (See Ibid.)



for a living. It is her practicing that was the “background” Aleksandrov recalls. His father, Nikolay Aleksandrov, although a chemist by profession, played the violin, improvised chord progressions on the piano, and had perfect pitch that was even better, more “subtle” than his wife’s, in Anatoly Aleksandrov’s opinion.<sup>19</sup> His serious interest in music went as far as to having studied music theory with Anton Arensky and other composers of the time.<sup>20</sup>

Both parents frequently played music together at home. Often they organized house concerts featuring their own performances, as well as inviting their friends for chamber music. From these performances Anatoly Aleksandrov especially remembers Grieg’s Violin Sonata in C Minor and Tchaikovsky’s Piano Trio.<sup>21</sup> Later, in his adult life, this tradition of house performances continued to thrive in Aleksandrov’s own home, and played an important part in promoting the composer’s new works.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to his parents, Aleksandrov’s nanny Vera Illarionovna was an important person close to him. She not only saved his life during his infancy,<sup>23</sup> but was the first person to introduce a true folk experience to the young Anatoly. Being a peasant woman, she was not very educated, but her singing greatly impressed Aleksandrov with its direct clarity and unadorned folk idiom.<sup>24</sup> Some of the songs stayed so firmly in his memory, that he later composed a romance based on one of the songs he heard from

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Blume, ed. *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2d ed. (Kassel; New York: Bärenreiter, 1999), s.v. “Aleksandrov, Anatolii,” by Christoph Flamm, 431.

<sup>21</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat’i, pis’ma*, 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 128.

<sup>23</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat’i, pis’ma*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

her.<sup>25</sup> Vera Illarionovna remained with Aleksandrov's family until 1942, having raised his daughter and granddaughter. In 1946 the composer dedicated three romances from Op. 63 (including the one based on her song) to her.

Anatoly Aleksandrov had three siblings. His older brother Peter died in infancy.<sup>26</sup> His older sister Olga or Lyolya, as she was nicknamed in the family, also received musical instruction from her mother.<sup>27</sup> There is very little information about her, primarily since the composer never mentioned her in the published memoirs.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the age gap prevented a close relationship between them.<sup>29</sup> With his brother Vladimir on the other hand, who was two years younger, Aleksandrov had a very affectionate rapport. From the time spent closely together during childhood,<sup>30</sup> through the long distance correspondence while Vladimir was in Switzerland,<sup>31</sup> to his death in 1958, which deeply saddened Aleksandrov,<sup>32</sup> the brothers remained close souls, sharing secrets, thoughts, and feelings. In the composer's own words, "It is amazing that even though I had not seen my brother since 1913 [an interval of 45 years!], all these years...I had the feeling that we were living together... He was the closest person to me, with whom we had an unspoken

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<sup>25</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> From Aleksandrov's letter printed in Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 112.

<sup>27</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> Aleksandrov mentioned her in only one letter to his father. Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 136.

<sup>29</sup> Although Olga's date of birth is unknown, she appears to be at least 5 years older, as evident in the two photographs in Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 312, and Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 128.

<sup>30</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 16-17.

<sup>31</sup> Vladimir Aleksandrov became a professor of physics and mathematics at the University of Zurich. (Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 86.)

<sup>32</sup> See Aleksandrov's letter in *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 101.

understanding, and it was so good to realize that he was in the world, even though I did not see him.”<sup>33</sup>

His father’s work assignments<sup>34</sup> caused Aleksandrov’s family to move three times during the first eighteen years of his life. This situation divides his childhood into three equal six-year periods:

1. Moscow: 1888-1894
2. Yuryev (now Tartu, the second largest city of Estonia): 1894-1900
3. Tomsk: 1900-1906

Of the three periods, Aleksandrov remembers the time in Yuryev as one of the happiest, if not the happiest in his life.<sup>35</sup> Also, in the composer’s own recollections each period is connected with particular musical impressions. For instance, in Moscow he remembers the music of Chopin, Bach’s Preludes and Fugues, Mozart’s C minor Fantasy, and Beethoven’s sonatas.<sup>36</sup> In Yuryev, on the other hand, it is the music of Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mussorgsky that made the strongest impression.<sup>37</sup> In Tomsk Aleksandrov’s musical experience shifts toward his own piano studies and playing four-hand repertoire with his mother.<sup>38</sup> This is also the period in which he creates his first “conscious” music composition: a “Funeral March” for piano.<sup>39</sup>

Aside from these impressions that came mainly from music making at home, young Aleksandrov was inspired by external musical sources. Among these was singing

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Aleksandrov’s father was a professor of pharmacy.

<sup>35</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat’i, pis’ma*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 35.

in a gymnasium choir and listening to wandering street musicians, singers, folk ensembles and hurdy-gurdy players. Many of these musical inspirations, as with his nanny's songs, later became part of his music.<sup>40</sup>

Before concluding the discussion of the composer's childhood, it is significant to describe a special connection of Aleksandrov's family with Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Viktor Beliaev even calls such connection "Tchaikovsky's cult,"<sup>41</sup> and there is good reason for using such a strong term. Tchaikovsky's music was especially beloved in Aleksandrov's home, and Aleksandrov's mother prominently featured it in her concert repertoire.<sup>42</sup> However, what makes the connection unique is that Aleksandrov's mother was Tchaikovsky's harmony student in the Moscow Conservatory, and the two built a close relationship that lasted until Tchaikovsky's death. To illustrate the nature of this relationship it is enough to mention that Tchaikovsky was the godfather of Aleksandrov's younger brother,<sup>43</sup> and that he gave a photo with a warm personal inscription, along with several manuscripts, to Aleksandrov's mother.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Tchaikovsky helped her look for work during difficult times, as evident from his recommendation letters still kept in the family's archive.<sup>45</sup> A five-year-old Aleksandrov remembers how deeply his family was affected on the day of Tchaikovsky's death in 1893.<sup>46</sup> On that day the family lost a dear friend.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>41</sup> Victor Beliaev, *Anatoly Nikolaevich Aleksandrov* (Moskva: Muz. sektor, Gos. izd-vo, 1927), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 112.

<sup>44</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 19.

<sup>45</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 10.

Anatoly Aleksandrov's childhood was a blissful period of his life, with many warm memories of time spent with parents, music at home, adventures with siblings, and walks in the parks and gardens. In his memoirs the composer recollects this period in such detail that it must have been not only a very memorable time, but a special place to which the composer constantly returned in his mind. His own words support this when he tenderly and somewhat nostalgically writes about the time when he was 7-10 years old, "Captivated by our carefree childlike outlook of the world and our childlike interests, we effortlessly absorbed everything good and enchanting, which was in abundance in our surrounding life and nature, and hardly ever did we surprisingly encounter the darker side of existence."<sup>47</sup> This innocence, sensitivity, and innate optimism became the ground qualities of his personality and later, as is discussed in the following chapters, were reflected in his music.

In 1906, due to Aleksandrov's admission to Moscow University, the family moved back to Moscow, which remained his home until the end of his life. From this point on, his life was dedicated solely to his profession.

## Part II: Education and Career

Anatoly Aleksandrov began music and piano lessons at the age of eight with his mother. Almost at the same time, before even knowing how to read notes, he started composing, and his mother wrote down his little pieces.<sup>48</sup> Some of these pieces, with some textural changes, were published 56 years later as "Six Easy Pieces" in the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 20.

collection “When I Was Little.”<sup>49</sup> The music lessons at home continued through Aleksandrov’s secondary education, which was divided between two gymnasiums (grammar schools), one in Yuryev, and the other in Tomsk.

In 1906, as mentioned earlier, Aleksandrov enters Moscow University’s School of History and Philology, where he begins his studies in the department of philosophy. In the same year, however, he meets Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev, one of the most prominent composers of that time, who agrees to take Aleksandrov as his student of counterpoint once he had passed the harmony course.<sup>50</sup> Thus, following the master’s recommendation, Aleksandrov studies harmony with Nikolay Zhilyayev, Taneyev’s former student, for nearly a year.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, Taneyev invites Anatoly to be a part of his famous “Tuesdays”: evenings which gathered Taneyev’s relatives and friends, mainly the progressive composers, poets and artists of the time, among whom, for instance, were Sergei Rachmaninov, Alexander Goldenweiser, Leonid Sabaneyev, and Nikolay Metner.<sup>52</sup> The guests at these gatherings discussed the new direction of art and music, politics, and philosophy.<sup>53</sup> As a special exception, Taneyev advises Aleksandrov to come to his home a couple hours prior to these evenings for discussions and study of music.<sup>54</sup> Aleksandrov studies with Taneyev approximately from 1906 until he enters Moscow Conservatory’s composition department in 1910, but even during his conservatory years until 1915 when Taneyev passed away, they continue to meet for study and discussions.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>51</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 59.

<sup>53</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 38-39.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

The time spent with Taneyev was very meaningful for Aleksandrov. In his recollections about his first music mentor he respectfully recognizes Taneyev's broad knowledge and skills, noble personal qualities, and praises him as an exceptional pedagogue.<sup>56</sup> He ends the memoirs with the following: "I am happy to have been his student and that my musical growth happened under his supervision."<sup>57</sup>

As music becomes continuously more important for Aleksandrov, he decides to enter the Moscow Conservatory. In 1909 he is accepted into the piano department, where he studies first with Vladimir Vilshau, and then with Konstantine Igumnov. In 1910 he also enters the composition department and studies under Aleksandr A. Ilyinsky the subjects of counterpoint, fugue, and music form, as well as under Sergei Vasilenko in free composition class. That same year he leaves Moscow University without finishing the program of study.

In 1915 Aleksandrov finishes the piano degree and passes to the next, "virtuoso," level of study. In 1916 he also completes the degree in composition. For his final examination work, a two-act opera entitled "Two Worlds," Aleksandrov earns a gold medal.<sup>58</sup> That year, having already established the reputation of a promising composer, Aleksandrov starts publishing his work. The first publication in 1916 includes works written between 1907 and 1910; thus, Aleksandrov considers 1907 to be the official beginning of his career.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Aleksandrov's "Recollections of Taneyev" essay in Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 37-62.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>58</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 13.

World War I and the events of the October Revolution in 1917 disturb the regular flow of Alexandrov's life. Although he does not actively participate in political and revolutionary events, he does not have any doubts about the new government, and as soon as the Soviet Intelligentsia begins work on forming the new social culture, he joins this venture with full force and energy.<sup>60</sup>

Aleksandrov's contribution to "building the young Soviet culture"<sup>61</sup> results in frequent opportunities for professional employment. Thus, between 1917 and 1923 he works for the aesthetic branch of the People's commissariat of Education in the Music department, where he is involved in forming the materials on the Soviet philosophy of music.<sup>62</sup> He also serves as assistant conductor in the Chamber Theater of A. Tairov<sup>63</sup> and as editor in the State Publishing House's music department. In addition, Aleksandrov writes music and conducts the orchestras in several Moscow theaters: First State Children's Theater in Moscow (founded in 1918), State Demonstration Theater (1919-1920), and Maly Theater (founded in 1824).<sup>64</sup> Moreover, he teaches harmony in the Institute of Rhythmic Education, founded by his wife. During this time he also continues to perform as soloist, accompanist, and lecturer for the audiences of the working class.<sup>65</sup>

The Russian Civil War briefly interrupts Aleksandrov's promising career. Between 1919 and 1920 he is mobilized to serve in the Red Army three times. As a noncombatant due to his poor vision, he is ordered to accompany singers,

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<sup>60</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 123-24.

<sup>61</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 124.

<sup>63</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



instrumentalists, and dancers organized by the Special Designation Unit of Moscow's chief enlistment officer.<sup>66</sup> Eventually, Aleksandrov is demobilized because of illness.

In 1923, Aleksandrov is promoted to the member of the artistic committee at the State Publishing House and holds this position for the next three years. In the same year he is invited to teach in the Moscow Conservatory, where he lectures a newly developed course in modern harmony. In 1926 he becomes a full professor of free composition at the Conservatory, where he teaches with complete dedication for 42 years.

Along with the job at the conservatory, Aleksandrov continues composing, performing and writing, appearing on the radio and television, and publishing his works. He also stays actively involved in several professional organizations, such as the Group of Moscow Composers, the Association of Modern Music, renamed in 1928 as the Russian National Society of Modern Music, and the Union of Soviet Composers.

Alongside a flourishing career Aleksandrov was also a family man. His wife, Nina Georgievna Geiman-Aleksandrova, was a pianist and a singer, and until 1905 studied in the St. Petersburg Conservatory, from which she was expelled for protesting against the firing of Rimsky-Korsakov.<sup>67</sup> During her piano studies at the Geneva Conservatory she also studied eurhythmics with Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, who became a close family friend.<sup>68</sup> Upon moving back to Russia, Nina Georgievna organized the first-of-its-kind Institute of Rhythmic Education, where Aleksandrov taught harmony, as previously noted. She also taught eurhythmics in the Moscow Conservatory for 41 years.

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<sup>66</sup> Details about Aleksandrov's service in the Red Army can be found in his memoirs published in Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 10-29.

<sup>67</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> This is evident from the correspondence between Aleksandrov and his parents. See Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 136-37.

It must be noted that Aleksandrov himself had a great interest in eurhythmics, and studied it with Dalcroze during summer festivals in Germany.<sup>69</sup>

The couple met in Switzerland in 1909 and was married in 1910. Nina Georgievna played an important role in promoting Aleksandrov's music, namely by performing his vocal works in house concerts and other venues, with Aleksandrov usually accompanying her on the piano.<sup>70</sup>

Nina and Anatoly had a daughter, Tatyana. The composer fathered another daughter, Elena Polenova, whose mother was the daughter of the famous Russian painter Vasily D. Polenov. Although Elena was one of the first people to publicize Aleksandrov's work,<sup>71</sup> the true nature of the circumstances leading to her extramarital birth is unknown. It is known, however, that the family of Polenov was in close relationship with Aleksandrov's.<sup>72</sup> Elena Polenova is 85 years old and currently resides in Moscow. Meanwhile, Aleksandrov's family extends into the future generation with two grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Aleksandrov's work was well recognized by the government. For his service to the Soviet musical culture, achievements in composition, performance, and research, and commitment to education, he was awarded several premier titles in the former Soviet Union. These include the Doctor of Art History (without the defense of thesis) in 1941, the Order of the Red Banner of Labor in 1943, the honorary title of the Honored Artist of

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<sup>69</sup> As evident from his letters to Nina in Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 76-83.

<sup>70</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 160.

<sup>71</sup> Be reminded that Elena Polenova was one of the two authors who compiled two books with the most important materials about the composer.

<sup>72</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 127.

RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) in 1946, the State Award of the USSR (Aleksandrov is the only Soviet composer with this award for children's piano pieces<sup>73</sup>) in 1951, the award of the Order of Lenin in 1953, the People's Artist of RSFSR award in 1964, and the People's Artist of the USSR award in 1971.

During 1960s, during an increase in his compositional output, Aleksandrov's life is saddened by several deaths of people who were very dear to him: his friend and colleague Samuil Feinberg in 1962, his wife Nina Georgievna in 1964 and Nataliya Polenova (Elena's mother), his daughter Tatiana in 1968. It is very likely that these events influenced Aleksandrov's decision to leave his position at the Moscow Conservatory. For the remainder of his life he fully immerses himself in composing and performing. He died on April 16, 1982, in Moscow at the age of 94. His last words were, "No music."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 207.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **ALEKSANDROV'S MUSIC IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Of the ninety-four years of Anatoly Aleksandrov's life, seventy-five were dedicated to the composition of music. A total of 112 opuses<sup>75</sup> encompass a variety of genres, including four operas, two symphonies, four string quartets, piano music, numerous vocal works, a piano concerto, a cello sonata, and music for drama, film, and animation, as well as songs and piano pieces for children. The most significant was the composer's output in the area of vocal music and piano music, which is evident not only in the exceeding numbers of these compositions above other genres, but also their artistic value. Aleksandrov was composing with admirable diligence and consistency, unshaken even by the disruptions of war; thus, his works were evenly spread through the years of his life, forming a unique view of the musical story in twentieth century Russia.

Full understanding of Anatoly Aleksandrov's music is impossible without a discussion of the historical events surrounding his life. Some events were briefly mentioned in the biographical chapter, but consideration of their effect on Russian musical life, and particularly Aleksandrov's compositions, is reserved for this part of the study. During the 94 years of his life the composer witnessed several of the most crucial changes in the history of Russia, including the Great October Revolution in 1917 and both world wars. Having received his education in pre-revolutionary Russia, when the

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<sup>75</sup> Op. 112, a sonata for violoncello and piano, composed in 1982, shortly before the composer passed away, was not finished by Aleksandrov. It was edited and completed by his student Vladimir Blok.

gates to Western Europe were wide open, and having composed most of his works in the Soviet Union, when the Iron Curtain tightly closed every gap leading into the West, Aleksandrov was one of the few composers who absorbed the influences of both Western and Soviet worlds. This unique position influenced him and his works.

While it is certain that historical and political circumstances affected Aleksandrov's music, the question of their control over his creativity is a more intriguing issue well worth exploring. Before considering this, however, it would be helpful to examine the historical background that formed the foundation for Aleksandrov's compositions.

It is not the purpose of this study to survey the history of Russian music; however, several points need to be made in order to demonstrate the historical situation leading up to the end of the nineteenth century, when Aleksandrov was born.

The long winding path of Russian music spanning some ten centuries has followed quite an unusual pattern, characterized mainly by only sporadic progress. The development of Russian music through the ages has been constantly interrupted by socio-political events, such as numerous invasions, the "extreme dogmatism" of the Orthodox Eastern Church,<sup>76</sup> and overall geographical and cultural isolation, caused by the breaking up of the Roman Empire at the very beginning and the establishment of the Iron Curtain at the end.<sup>77</sup> All of this led to the irregular absorption of influences from the Byzantine on one hand and the West on the other, which resulted in a special eclecticism that became one of the most characteristic features of Russian composers and continued to be evident

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Anthony Leonard, *A History of Russian Music* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 18.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

through the twentieth century. This point was best stated by Richard Leonard in his study on the subject, when he wrote that aside from his “strong nationalism, the Russian is also by nature an eclectic, a synthesizer, whose keen perceptions, if they are given free rein, will range over a very wide field.”<sup>78</sup>

Historians usually discount the value of Russian music before the seventeenth century, as in case of Francis Maes, one of the most recent authors on the subject, who simply states “Before that time it lacked a fertile breeding ground, the Church having invariably denounced secular music.”<sup>79</sup> For this, most sources superficially skim through this period or omit it altogether. The period from 1650 to 1800, on the other hand, is a much more active stage. Owing considerably to the progressive reforms of Peter the Great, many scientific and cultural accomplishments of the West finally become known in Russia. The founding of Petersburg in 1703 is of no lesser importance; the city remained the center of cultural and musical life for longer than a century.

Not until the end of this period, permeated by a strong Italian influence, does the interest in musical elements that are essentially Russian slowly begin to emerge. This is the time when the names of the first individual Russian composers appear, specifically Fomin, Matinsky, and Paskevich. Although their compositions, mainly operas, could hardly be called original, as they skillfully imitated the Italian style, these composers made an important contribution in the employment of Russian folk materials. This procedure was the first step that distinguished Russian music from its much more experienced Western neighbor.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>79</sup> Francis Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 14.

The defeat of Napoleon in 1812 inspired a strong national feeling in Russia. This circumstance was embraced by a young Russian composer Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), whose creative musical gift transformed the musical life of Russia. It would not be an exaggeration to say that most people consider Russian music non-existent before Glinka. His influence on future generations of composers is enormous beyond description. As the “symbol for the nineteenth-century concept of nationalism in art,”<sup>80</sup> Glinka and his legacy charged the Russian music of the nineteenth century with the power to develop further than ever before.

The second half of the nineteenth century marks one of the most combative phases in the course of the development of Russian music. Maes refers to this stage as “The Clash of Ideas: The Quest for the Essence of the New Russian Music,”<sup>81</sup> which accurately reflects the attitudes during that time. This quest is first vividly evident in the rivalry of several musically active groups, of which two are at the forefront: the group led by Miliy Balakirev, commonly known as the Mighty Five, or *Moguchaya Kuchka*, and the group around Anton Rubinstein. Maes points out that aside from personal conflicts between the two men fighting for a “viable musical career,” a bigger ideological issue was at the heart of the conflict, namely “a different aesthetic ideal, a distinct conception of the essence and function of music. At stake was a conflict between conservative and progressive musical ideals: specifically, the distinction between *abstract* and *program* music and between music-oriented and realistic opera aesthetics.”<sup>82</sup> Anton Rubinstein, highly trained according to the Western methods, was an advocate of the conservative

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<sup>80</sup> Leonard, *A History of Russian Music*, 37.

<sup>81</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

ideals in music. Inspired by admiration of Chopin and Schumann, his musical approach was “grounded in tradition.”<sup>83</sup> (In the Western tradition, one must add). To Rubinstein, “National music existed exclusively in folk songs and folk dance. In larger works there was no room for the national element.”<sup>84</sup> The members of Rubinstein’s circle believed that the use of folk elements alone does not make music national. They also were opposed to program music and opera. Such an attitude was mainly exemplified by the writings of the circle’s member Herman Laroche, who was highly influenced by the critic Eduard Hanslick’s ideas that music should express only what is ‘inexpressible’ in words.<sup>85</sup>

The Mighty Five group, consisting of dedicated composers<sup>86</sup> who lacked the level of training Rubinstein had had, was the progressive circle. They supported Balakirev’s musical views, which favored models of Berlioz and Liszt and the “free form” music that challenged traditional formal patterns. They advocated program music and believed that “Music needed a content to develop into a full-fledged form of art.”<sup>87</sup> The issue of the “link between music and content” became critical in the conflict. Furthermore, the idea of content as real life, inspired by Russian realist philosophy, led the composers to a “musical form of realism,” where the artist seeks “not to portray beauty but to discover and reveal reality.”<sup>88</sup> Mussorgsky was the most successful in the application of this ideal to music. Although the ideal seemed noble and convincing,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>86</sup> The members of the Mighty Five were M. Balakirev, M. Mussorgsky, C. Cui, A. Borodin, and N. Rimsky-Korsakov.

<sup>87</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 53.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 56.



Francis Maes suggests that Balakirev's circle members adopted it enthusiastically, "for it legitimized their lack of technical knowledge."<sup>89</sup>

The battle between the two circles ended in the end of the nineteenth century in favor of the Conservatives, when the members of the Mighty Five drifted apart due to the disagreements within the group, among other circumstances. What is more significant is the result – the contributions from each group that became permanent factors in the musical life of Russia. The composers of the Mighty Five, with their experiments with folk melody, harmonization, and chromatic harmony, enhanced the tonal language of music, thus preparing the ground for early twentieth century modernists. In addition, the idea of realism in music later was reflected in Soviet social realism. In turn, the Conservative camp accomplished an even bigger venture – the establishment of the Petersburg Conservatory of Music by Anton Rubinstein in 1862, and the Moscow Conservatory of Music by his brother Nicholas four years later. This was an immeasurable gift to Russian music education.

Anatoly Aleksandrov was born into a time when the rivalry of opposing camps had just subsided. Tchaikovsky was "at the height of the international career," while the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, and Borodin "enjoyed a growing recognition abroad."<sup>90</sup> The latter two enjoyed it only posthumously since they had died in 1881 and 1887 respectively. The last decades of the nineteenth century were distinguished as "an age of great pedagogues."<sup>91</sup> Rimsky-Korsakov successfully taught composition in

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, Enlarged edition, 1917-1981, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 6.

<sup>91</sup> Leonard, *A History of Russian Music*, 199.

Petersburg, and Nicholas Rubinstein was an established piano instructor in Moscow. Among others, such pedagogues as Theodor Leschetitzky (piano) and Leopold Auer (violin) gave rise to instrumental virtuosity. The so-called Second Generation of Composers,<sup>92</sup> born in the 1850s and 1860s, began to emerge on the music scene. They included Liadov, Liapunov, Arensky, Ippolitov-Ivanov, Glazunov, Gretchaninov, and Aleksandrov's future teacher Taneyev.

In the meantime, one important change occurred in the closing decades of the century. This change concerned art patronage. In addition to the nobility, who traditionally sponsored the arts, the capitalist entrepreneurs began to invest in them. Increasing numbers of these businessmen, who were working mainly in Moscow, participated very actively in this endeavor. Maes explains, "For successful businessmen, art patronage meant investing in public prestige, a means of bolstering their own rather modest status. In order to avoid competition with the nobility, they concentrated on art forms that lay outside the aristocratic sphere of interest, collecting modern art, for instance, rather than works by the classical masters."<sup>93</sup> This particular interest in modern art, along with the fortunes these men were willing to spend on it, created a promising environment for progressive Russian culture. In the realm of music, two capitalists played an especially important role: Mitrofan Belyayev in Petersburg and Slava Mamontov in Moscow. The former of these gathered around him a circle of the most prominent musicians from both older and younger generations, including Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, Lyadov, Gretchaninov, and especially Scriabin, whom Belyayev took "under

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>93</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 172.

his wing.”<sup>94</sup> Although criticized for his limited taste in Russian music and for favoring traditionally trained composers over young unrecognized talents,<sup>95</sup> Belyayev created a vibrant music scene with numerous concert series, music funding, competitions, and publications of Russian scores. This laid the foundation for one of the most creative periods in Russian music: the period that falls roughly between the early 1900s until mid 1920s, the time when Aleksandrov found himself as composer.

The study of the historical events surrounding the compositional work of Aleksandrov will be divided into five periods: the Early Composition Period, the Transition Stage, the Socialism Realism Stage, the Career Peak, and the Late Period. Since this portion of the document aims to examine the connection between Aleksandrov’s music and the socio-political and cultural situations around him, these periods are not concerned with compositional style, which will be discussed later, but strictly with historical background.

#### The Early Composition Period: 1906-1916

This period covers Aleksandrov’s compositional work during his student years, beginning with the time when he had just moved to Moscow and started studying with Taneev and Zhilyayev, and ending with his graduation from the Moscow Conservatory. Specifically, during this time he composed Opus 1 (1907) through Opus 11 (1915).

On one hand, this was a very dynamic period in Russian music, marked by ever increasing interest in modernism and new liberal attitudes concerning the role of Russian

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<sup>94</sup> Leonard, *A History of Russian Music*, 212-13.

<sup>95</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 173.

art. On the other hand, since this period closely corresponded to the historical events leading up to the 1917 Revolution, it was a time filled with many hardships and terrors caused by wars. Indeed, beginning with the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, followed by the two-year 1905 Russian Revolution, and through the First World War, which started in 1914 and ended for Russia in 1917 with the eruption of the October Revolution, the country was devastated.

These horrific events could not have passed unnoticed by the artists and very likely contributed to the heightened search for new means of expression in music. Moreover, the autocracy of the Tsar added pressure and dissatisfaction among musicians, which is evident in an open letter signed by many prominent figures in the Moscow music scene, including Rachmaninov and Tanyeyev, that states, “Only free art is vital, only free creativity is joyful....When in the land there is neither freedom of thought and conscience nor freedom of word and print..., then the profession of ‘free artist’ becomes a bitter irony.”<sup>96</sup>

Urgent yearning for change created a heated atmosphere among artists, poets, and musicians, who challenged existing models in art by creating new ones. Modernism, symbolism, and even avant-garde are just a few of the trends explored by the artists. This period in history is known as the Silver Age. Maes describes the modernism of this age as “an amalgam of divergent movements: neonationalism, symbolism, primitivism (*Skifstvo*), acmeism, and futurism.”<sup>97</sup> He continues by pointing out that these movements

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<sup>96</sup> From Yastrebtsev, quoted in Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 4.

<sup>97</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 199.

all had a common ground of opposition to realism,<sup>98</sup> the forefront idea of Balakirev's Mighty Five. Transcending reality versus reflecting reality was the thought inspired partly by the "art for art's sake" concept, and partly by Nietzsche's philosophy about art being able to change reality.<sup>99</sup>

While the new modernist movement was more present than ever before in Russia, the traditional position of the Belyayev circle composers and the conservatories was still very influential. Thus, the division between conservatives and progressives continued. In the meantime, the Silver Age brought forth much of the vibrant imagination and limitless possibilities in art that we admire in the works of such individuals as Stravinsky, Diaghilev, Scriabin, and early Prokofiev.

#### Transition Stage: 1917-1927

A year after graduating from the Moscow Conservatory, Aleksandrov found himself surrounded by the groundbreaking events of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia. This marked the beginning of the Transition Stage, which extended through the end of Lenin's New Economic Plan (NEP) in 1927. The sweeping changes in virtually all areas of life in Russian society during this period were hardly distracting for the young Aleksandrov, as this perhaps was the time of his most creative and fruitful compositional output, ranging from op. 12 to op. 34.

As previously mentioned, Aleksandrov did not directly take part in revolutionary events, although as described by his biographer Kokushkin, he was very much interested

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 201.

in politics and supported the revolution from his late teenage years by reading Marx's and Engels's writings, attending lectures, and joining pro-revolutionary student groups.<sup>100</sup> Along with many contemporary Russian composers, Aleksandrov aspired to create music for the new society. What precisely were the compositional means in developing such new music became the central subject for disagreement between two main music organizations: the "Association of Contemporary Music" (ACM) and the "Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians" (RAPM). While the composers on both sides pursued a common aim of creating progressive Soviet music, ACM argued that "The revolution necessitated new forms of expression,"<sup>101</sup> thus supporting all current modernistic trends. RAPM, on the other hand, stood by the Communist morale, which was "service and devotion to the common people,"<sup>102</sup> and believed that the music must reflect the ideology of the revolution and be easily understood by the working class.<sup>103</sup> Consequently, these composers were opposed not only to complex modernism, but to individual expression.

At the heart of the conflict between the two organizations was the view expressed by ACM's president and prominent music critic Leonid Sabaneyev, who insisted that music has no ideology, that it is a world in itself.<sup>104</sup> He also claimed that "Music can give expression to a new ideology only if it renews its own sound material."<sup>105</sup> This idea, combined with free international interactions between Soviet and foreign musicians

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<sup>100</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 9.

<sup>101</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 246.

<sup>102</sup> James Bakst, *A History of Russian-Soviet Music* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1966), 281.

<sup>103</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 246.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

(mainly due to Lenin's NEP), justified ACM composers to experiment with a variety of modern styles, ranging from symbolism to constructivism. It is not surprising that RAPM constantly attacked ACM composers, including Aleksandrov, with such statements as an open letter to Lunacharsky expressed in *Muzyka I Otyabr* (1926 No 4-5): "These composers were technically skillful in form, but in content expressing the ideology of decadent bourgeoisie."<sup>106</sup> As known from Aleksandrov's autobiography, these and similar statements by RAPM deeply wounded him both professionally and personally; he even admits undergoing a mild depression in his creative work during the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>107</sup>

Aleksandrov was an ardent member of the ACM. This is evident in numerous articles he wrote and published for organization's two monthly journals, *Contemporary Music* and *To the New Shores*. Not only did he serve on the editorial committee of the journal, but his music was regularly performed at virtually every concert organized by the Association. Furthermore, his works were frequently published not only by Russia's own MUZGIZ (the State Music Publishing House), but by Vienna's "Universal Edition," which was in collaboration with MUZGIZ at the time.<sup>108</sup>

The five piano sonatas Aleksandrov composed during this period (No. 2-6) reflect two characteristic traits, as a consequence of these events: a unique musical atmosphere marked by the inconsistent use of new and traditional techniques, which was caused by the ideological conflict of ACM and RAPM, and the ambitions of the young skillful and daring composer experimenting with modernism.

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<sup>106</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 55.

<sup>107</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 19.

<sup>108</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 245.

### Socialist Realism: 1928-1945

The beginning of this stage marks the end of the liberal creative experimentation during Lenin's NEP. Stalin's First and Second Five-Year Plans followed by the Second World War depict this period in the darkest colors. With Stalin in power, all cultural entities became controlled by proletarian organizations, which meant that RAPM gained power over all music projects. In 1932, however, RAPM was disassembled, and instead, the Union of Soviet Composers was formed, which resulted in the centralization of all Soviet musical life.<sup>109</sup> In practical terms, only the members of the Union could submit requests for their works to be published and performed. Furthermore, the fulfillment of these requests could be granted only after the special committee consisting of other members carefully reviewed and approved the works. The criterion for the approval was based on underlining principles of socialist realism, a very broad concept that defined the arts in the Soviet Russia.

At its core, social realism in art is based on Marx's philosophy, which states that "Art can achieve unity with life and with progressive political ideas only in a Communist society in which Communist reality becomes the object of art. The art of this Communist realism is a product, and like any other product, it serves a public, which...can understand it and enjoy its beauty."<sup>110</sup> Thus, the goal of every artist becomes the reflection of this Communist reality and life, namely the "revolutionary struggle of the proletariat" and the "building of Socialism,"<sup>111</sup> in a simple and natural way that speaks to the mass population. In music, this resulted in numerous vocal compositions based on the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>110</sup> Bakst, *A History of Russian-Soviet Music*, 278-79.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 285.



history of revolutionary events, folk song arrangements, and other similar works that visibly displayed ideological content. It is also evident in Aleksandrov's output during this period. Of the 25 opuses composed during this time (op. 35-op. 60), only three are instrumental works (Piano Sonatas No. 7 and No. 8 and a Ballade for piano), while the rest are songs, folk song arrangements, and film and drama music.

Aside from the ideological message, there were purely musical aspects that had to be observed by the composers. On one hand, there was a system of special musical *intonations*, or motives, developed by Boris Asafiev, a renowned Russian musicologist. These *intonations* acted as the “carriers of the ideological significances of Russian nationalism and of Soviet reality... that unified into a single process the various aspects of musical creativity: performance, perception, style, form, and expressive elements.”<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, the compositions had to depict not only dynamic development, but also the peaceful, contemplative mood. Conciseness of form and optimistic spirit were among other valued features in the music of Soviet realism.

All possible flaws in compositions were identified by the Soviet authorities as “formalism.” Leonard provides the most concise definition of this “catch-word...which conveniently summarized all which was bad and to be avoided”: 1. “Art for art's sake, as opposed to art with a message.” 2. Art “for the few, instead of for the many.” 3. “Extreme of individualism, sophistication, or experimentation...and excessive use of abstraction.” 4. Art that is “too concerned with esoterica, too refined technically, or too complex for

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 286-287.

easy consumption of the masses.” He also expresses an opinion that formalism was usually linked with Western art.<sup>113</sup>

These unwritten laws for music, although very vague and arguably justifiable, proved to be a tremendous obstacle for many composers of that time, including Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Miaskovsky. Like many others, Aleksandrov had to follow a path of compromise with the authorities, as noted by the Russian musicologist Olkhovsky, who immigrated to the United States in 1942. The author seems convinced that, as in the case of Feinberg, Aleksandrov lost his creative personality of the 1920s owing to the demands of Soviet mass music.<sup>114</sup>

#### Career Peak: 1945-1964

During World War II, as Soviet Russia focused on fighting the enemy and allied with the Western forces, the formalistic grip was loosened, and musicians even resumed direct contacts with the West.<sup>115</sup> Aleksandrov took this brief opportunity to compose two string quartets and arrange nine American folk songs for voice and piano.<sup>116</sup> After the war, however, the strict enforcement of social realism principles in music returned. Ever stronger anti-Western propaganda and a greater stress on ideological concepts in the arts were ruthlessly implemented by Zhdanov, then in charge of all art policies. But this forced focus on ideological aspects resulted in a lower quality of musical compositions during the late 1940s to early 1950s. Boris Schwarz comments that “Music became dull,

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<sup>113</sup> Leonard, *A History of Russian Music*, 290.

<sup>114</sup> Andrey Vasilyevich Olkhovsky, *Music under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 184.

<sup>115</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 188.

<sup>116</sup> American Folk Songs, Op. 56, composed in 1944.

bland, conventional, inoffensive. The new tendency was to avoid depicting conflict ...sugar-coating contemporary life, glossing over any negative aspects of Soviet existence.”<sup>117</sup>

The situation improved after Stalin’s death in 1953, when the Second Congress of the Composers’ Union reached the decision to yield to creativity of the composers and be less rigid, while still guided by the ideals of the Socialist Realism. Schwarz calls the years 1953-1964 “The Cultural Honeymoon” marked by a “more humane approach to the creative process, contrasted with Stalin’s dehumanized dogmatism.”<sup>118</sup> During this time many works of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, Khachaturian, and others, criticized in earlier years for formalism, were reevaluated and given more artistic significance. In addition, a cultural exchange agreement with the United States was reached, allowing composers and musicologists to be up to date with the latest musical innovations. The establishment of the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1958 was another important accomplishment of this period.

In terms of musical context, the situation was somewhat ironic. On one hand, the composers yearned for more freedom of expression and received it when the Party’s leader Khrushchev called upon all artists to display “greater daring in their quest.”<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, the composers could not agree on how to musically express such “daring.” Many modernist twentieth-century trends, such as dodecaphony or free use of dissonance, were still considered formalistic. One can imagine the difficulty of the composers’ search for inspiration when limited to the use of old fashioned techniques.

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<sup>117</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 259.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 324-325.

Since these composers could not resist the occasional use of new techniques, they were compelled to justify this intention with an extramusical influence in order to validate the piece to the authorities. Aaron Copland notes this upon his visit to the Soviet Union in the 1960s in observation, “Any dissonance became permissible when its use seemed justified by some literary story content.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, even during this seemingly liberating period in music, the works of the Soviet composers remained unaffected by the new musical developments of the twentieth century.

For Aleksandrov, this time was a peak of his career as an established pedagogue at the Moscow Conservatory and respected Soviet composer, the recipient of numerous titles and awards. His works, ranging from opus 61 to opus 90, included more instrumental music than the previous period, among them five piano sonatas, a string quartet, and an orchestral overture. As discussed in the future chapter, stylistically these works present a well crafted compromise between the use of modern techniques and observation of the principles of socialist realism in music.

#### The Late Period: 1964-1982

Aleksandrov’s retirement from the Moscow Conservatory did not decrease his productivity as a composer. On the contrary, during the last two decades of his life Aleksandrov adopted to previously unexplored genres by composing two symphonies, a children’s opera, a piano concerto, and a cello sonata.

In 1964, the same year Aleksandrov left his teaching post at the Moscow Conservatory, Khrushchev left his post in the Party. Within a few months the Russian

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 332.

newspaper *Pravda* published an important statement concerning artistic creativity. Signed by its editor-in-chief, Alexei Rumyantsev, it proclaimed that “Genuine creativeness is possible only through search and experimentation, free expression and clashes of viewpoint.”<sup>121</sup> Rumyantsev also spoke against Party’s involvement in the work of the artists. Welcomed by the Western press, this statement aroused much controversy at home. Nevertheless, the number of available musical styles in 1965 began to expand rapidly. Avant-garde, serialism, aleatory, and other modern devices began to appear in the works of both young and more traditional composers.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, interest in jazz was encouraged after being forbidden for years. This turn of events was a promising one for Soviet composers, and even though Rumyantsev’s hope for abandoning the concepts of the socialist realism altogether was not fulfilled, the artists were on the way to slowly adopting a new musical language.

Aleksandrov did not live long enough to see music composition completely free of governmental control. Social realism along with its formalistic aspects ceased to exist with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, nine years after Aleksandrov’s death. To what extent the historical and political events influenced Aleksandrov’s thought and work is already evident in his choice of content and genres. Vocal music, operas, folk song arrangements, theater and film scores were not only the expressions of Aleksandrov’s lyric and dramatic musical talent, but the essential element for the viability of his career. He did not, however, resort to composing solely program music, so favored by the Soviet authorities. The fourteen piano sonatas hold an important place in

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 441.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 444.

the composer's output. It is very likely that these works served as a creative outlet in the midst of strictly regulated music conditions. The overview of these piano sonatas in the following chapter will show the stylistic progression that further reveals the influence of historical events on Aleksandrov's work.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **INFLUENCES**

An examination of Anatoly Aleksandrov's compositional style involves several important considerations. One of them – the historical and cultural background in Russia– was discussed above and demonstrated the turbulent artistic environment during the composer's life. Aleksandrov's choice of position among the variety of opposing musical tendencies in the early twentieth century determined not only the success of his career, but also his stylistic ideals. This portion of the study further explores the composer's association with the surrounding trends. Another factor is the influence from contemporary composers who most strongly affected Aleksandrov's musical convictions. Finally, the composer's personal convictions and values greatly contributed to the formation of his individual compositional principles. A deeper exploration of these issues will allow a clearer understanding of Aleksandrov's stylistic identification.

In 1977, when requested to comment on his musical style, an eighty-nine year old Aleksandrov said, "It is very difficult to talk about my own style and creative direction. Others should do it. In short, I consider myself a composer of the Moscow school headed by Tchaikovsky and its most prominent representatives: Scriabin, Rachmaninov, and Medtner. All these composers influenced my art in different degrees."<sup>123</sup> This statement points to the most important professional influences in Aleksandrov's musical career.

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<sup>123</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 9.

Aside from these, however, there are several other significant individuals who influenced his work, such as Prokofiev, Feinberg, and to an extent Miaskovsky. Aleksandrov's younger contemporary Shostakovich should also be included in the list. Additionally, some foreign influences, namely Debussy's impressionism and Schoenberg's dodecaphony, were not left unnoticed by Aleksandrov and left a visible mark on the composer's work.

### Taneyev and Zhilyaev

Aleksandrov's path as a composer of the "Moscow school" began with his study under Sergei Taneyev and Nikolai Zhilyaev. In his recollections, Aleksandrov recognizes the influence of his two teachers in the following statement, "In my youth, my esthetic influences were forming between two opposite sources. One came from Taneyev, who was a convinced musical traditionalist, and the other from his student Zhilyaev, who introduced me to Scriabin and Debussy, as well as convincing me that the contemporary work of an artist must open new horizons."<sup>124</sup>

Taneyev, who also taught Rachmaninov and Scriabin, was the representative of the "Russian traditionalism" in Moscow.<sup>125</sup> During a four-year study, which consisted of four-hand score readings of the various music literature examples, lengthy conversations about music and art, and technical work on counterpoint and composition, Aleksandrov not only became well acquainted with the traditions of Russian music, but also learned several important compositional principles that remained strongly rooted in his work. The

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 6.



most important one of these was the technical mastery of form and the balanced use of musical elements in a composition. In his interviews in 1975, Aleksandrov explains:

The greatest indication of form mastery is when the scheme or form are made unnoticeable and create the impression of improvisation, spontaneity. But this improvisation has to be logically and thoughtfully framed. This is what Taneyev taught. Thoughtful basis and spontaneity merge. What is created with the heart must go through the head. The mastery is contained in the ability to merge the analytical and improvisational.<sup>126</sup>

The equal interdependency of the emotional and the intellectual elements became a cornerstone in Aleksandrov's treatment of structure in his music.

Aleksandrov's harmony teacher Nikolai Zhilyaev influenced Aleksandrov in a different way. He encouraged creativity, personal taste, and inventiveness.<sup>127</sup> Unlike Taneyev, who drew his pupil's attention to examples from the classics, such as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, as well as Rimsky-Korsakov and Rachmaninov, Zhilyaev inspired Aleksandrov through the works of Grieg, Scriabin, and Debussy. He, too, stressed the importance of form in composition, but emphasized the greater role of content over structure.<sup>128</sup>

Aleksandrov admitted that his teachers' dissimilar musical tastes were beneficial for him when he said, "These two contrasting influences kept [me] within sensible limits, which tend to be broken by the young."<sup>129</sup> He also found it useful that such equilibrium on one hand avoided a tendency toward excessive modernism, and on the other hand, saved him from 'academism,' distrust of new things, and limited 'traditionalism.'<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 133.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>129</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 74.

<sup>130</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 30.

## Medtner

While Taneyev and Zhilyaev played a big role in the musical life of young Aleksandrov, his artistic goals of later years were largely influenced by his older contemporary Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951). Eight years senior to Aleksandrov, Medtner was considered one of the leading composers in pre-revolutionary Russia. The two composers met in 1907 during one of Taneyev's "Tuesdays," and after that meeting, Aleksandrov's interest in Medtner's music consistently increased. Aleksandrov was particularly inspired by Medtner's "extraordinarily original rhythm, harmony, and melody; the meaning, the richness, and the variety of images, and a sort of festivity that underlines it all, ritual-like splendor of all the pieces."<sup>131</sup> He also liked the overall strictness, the seriousness, the depth and broad imagination in Medtner's music.<sup>132</sup>

Apart from separate musical elements, Aleksandrov was drawn to Medtner's artistic and philosophical principles, which he found close to his own. Medtner, recalls Aleksandrov, "believed that true music is a unifying factor of all of its components: the primary components, which include image, motive, thematic material, and form, and the secondary components that consist of harmony, timbre, rhythm, etc. Secondary components should not be isolated from the primary."<sup>133</sup> The importance of musical image, melody, harmony, and form in Aleksandrov's work carried from Medtner and became an underlying stylistic trait.

Medtner's influence on Aleksandrov's music was noticed by many composers and critics, such as Miaskovsky, Beliaev, Kokushkin, and Mazel, among others. The

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<sup>131</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 62-63.

<sup>132</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 234.

<sup>133</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 66-67.

latter, for instance, pointed out the following qualities when discussing the similarity between the two composers: “poetically uplifted, spirited, noticeable role of narrative and fairy-tale images, polished form, and most obviously, the relationship between some compositional techniques and piano texture.”<sup>134</sup> As far back as 1923, Zhilyaev pointed out Medtner’s influence on Aleksandrov’s theme treatment and development, in character and progression of modulations, in pianistic style, in overall form, somewhat in harmony, and a little in the melodic figurations.<sup>135</sup> Aleksandrov, too, admitted Medtner’s effect on his music, particularly on his piano sonatas before 1944.<sup>136</sup> The chapter dedicated to the detailed discussion of Aleksandrov’s piano sonatas will further reveal numerous references to Medtner’s influence, particularly in the character and the development of Aleksandrov’s themes, and the tonal organization of the works.

Although Aleksandrov considered Medtner a genius composer, he did not idolize him and, as is evident from a 1929 letter, he could not tolerate the “fanatics who bowed before his every note.”<sup>137</sup> Moreover, he realized his mentor’s limitations during the late 1920s, when listeners demanded more daring and experimental works. In a letter to a close friend dated March 5, 1927, he writes:

Medtner, whom I love very much, is composing less well; moreover, his latest works are disappearing from the recital halls; they completely lack the embellishment that is so necessary for a large hall, and are full of very beautiful details which draw attention only in a small room . . . the audience remains cold to his music.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>135</sup> Nikolay Zhilyaev, "Anatoly Aleksandrov and His Third Piano Sonata," *To the New Shores*, no. 2 (1923): 33.

<sup>136</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 119.

<sup>137</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 140.

<sup>138</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 95-96.

One cannot help but notice a tint of nostalgia in Aleksandrov's words; the realization that Medtner's, and his own, values are no longer shared by the audience was perhaps an unconscious awareness of the future of Aleksandrov's own compositions, especially since Medtner's most favored feature in Aleksandrov's music was that it "preserved the basic principles of all music of the past."<sup>139</sup>

Despite Medtner's limited success with modern listeners, Aleksandrov faithfully admired him and appreciated the older master's great interest in his works and help with promoting his career. A statement from Aleksandrov's memoirs presents his most definite testament to Medtner and his meaning in Aleksandrov's life:

The time spent with Medtner finalized the formation of my ideals that did not fit with either Zhilyaev or Taneyev.... In Medtner's music one can find very modern techniques, as well as very old tools and means of expression. Yet, it is not the 'eclecticism' nor the 'academism,' neither it is the modernism. It is the real, the sincere. I, too, aim toward it.<sup>140</sup>

### Scriabin

Medtner found Alexander Scriabin's (1872-1915) musical ideals foreign to his own and could not accept his art, especially his late works, which Medtner called "a betrayal of music."<sup>141</sup> Aleksandrov, on the other hand, felt differently: "Scriabin was the first composer whose music had a colossal influence on me."<sup>142</sup> Aleksandrov was not the only composer affected by the magnetism of Scriabin's music. Most of the Russian composers of the early twentieth century at least to an extent found themselves under his "spell;" this was enhanced in part by Scriabin's early death in 1915. The immeasurable

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<sup>139</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 65.

<sup>140</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 9-10.

<sup>141</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 67.

<sup>142</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 247.

degree of this influence is evident in the multiple discussions and articles on the subject of Scriabin's impact on Russian music, written by the most acclaimed musicologists of the time, such as Igor Glebov (later known as Boris Asafiev), Leonid Sabaneyev, and Victor Beliaev. Moreover, advocates of Scriabin's music founded a Society of Scriabin's museum friends, of which Aleksandrov was a member.<sup>143</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Aleksandrov's interest in Scriabin's music was initiated by his teacher Zhilyaev, who praised it immensely, although he rejected Scriabin's theosophy. In 1907 Zhilyaev personally introduced Scriabin to the young Aleksandrov upon their visit to Scriabin's home, where the author first performed his newly composed Ninth Sonata.<sup>144</sup> The refinement, novelty, and the wealth of colors in Scriabin's music truly impressed Aleksandrov.<sup>145</sup> He recalls, "Scriabin in his creative individuality combined genius, inspiration, emotional intensity, and spontaneity with a great sense of purely musical beauty and proportion...His music is harmonically precise and enchantingly beautiful whether it is simple or strives to cross the limits of reality."<sup>146</sup> Aleksandrov adds that even when the content of Scriabin's music departed from his own convictions, he always understood it in its essence, sound, delicacy, and beauty.<sup>147</sup>

Scriabin's influence on Aleksandrov's music was reflected mainly in the areas of harmony, texture, and aspects of form. On several occasions Miaskovsky pointed out the

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<sup>143</sup> "Chronicles and Concerts," *To the New Shores*, no. 1 (1923): 47.

<sup>144</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 79.

<sup>145</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 234.

<sup>146</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 78.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

general effect of Scriabin's beginning and middle style periods on Aleksandrov's early piano works.<sup>148</sup> Specific examples of this are shown in the analysis of the piano sonatas.

### Rachmaninov

The place of Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) in Aleksandrov's life and work is less obvious than in the case of Medtner and Scriabin; however, it played a significant role not only in Aleksandrov's music, but also in his career. In the second decade of the twentieth century Rachmaninov was a well-established and highly respected composer and pianist. Aleksandrov's first meeting with Rachmaninov occurred in 1916 following a Moscow composition competition, in which the committee of judges, among whom were Rachmaninov and Medtner, awarded Aleksandrov's First String Quartet honorable mention.<sup>149</sup> As part of this recognition, Aleksandrov was invited to submit some of his scores to the Gutheil Publishing House,<sup>150</sup> where he met Rachmaninov in person for the first time. This opportunity, which continued well after Rachmaninov's emigration, perpetuated the regular publishing of Aleksandrov's works and thus attracted much attention to him on the part of most influential music circles from Moscow and St. Petersburg. However, Rachmaninov regarded Aleksandrov as a "true vocal composer" and remarked about his piano pieces, "You are not at home here."<sup>151</sup> According to

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<sup>148</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 231.

<sup>149</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 87.

<sup>150</sup> Gutheil Publishing House was sold to Boosey & Hawkes in 1947.

<sup>151</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 88.

Aleksandrov, Rachmaninov's judgement caused him to be considered only a composer of romances for a long time.<sup>152</sup>

Aleksandrov's opinion of Rachmaninov's skills as both composer and pianist was consistently favorable. He admits in an interview with Kokushkin, "I always loved Rachmaninov, even when others considered him a composer 'for the public.'"<sup>153</sup> He was critical, however, toward Rachmaninov's interpretation of Scriabin's works, when he wrote in his recollections that Scriabin should be played "ephemerally and ecstatically," not "powerfully," which was characteristic of Rachmaninov's pianism.<sup>154</sup>

Although in Aleksandrov's music there are not as many traces of Rachmaninov's style as Scriabin's and Medtner's, several characteristic elements can be observed as direct influences from Rachmaninov. Among the most important is the emotional intensity of Aleksandrov's many themes. This point was first suggested by Alexander Alekseev in his three-volume study of Russian piano music. He writes that the especially expressive nature of Aleksandrov's themes stemmed from Rachmaninov.<sup>155</sup> In another study, Kokushkin further points out that Rachmaninov's influence on Aleksandrov's music comes through his "broad and singing lyrical themes, national color, and some techniques in the statement of the themes, such as stating the material in parallel chords with arpeggiated background."<sup>156</sup> Most recently, Christoph Flamm also notes Rachmaninov's "deep and lasting influence" on Aleksandrov's music, particularly the

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 247.

<sup>154</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 86.

<sup>155</sup> Aleksandr Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945* (Moskva: Muzyka, 1974),

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<sup>156</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 293.

former's "emotional directness and concern for melody."<sup>157</sup> In addition, Kokushkin finds characteristic Rachmaninov bell-like passages in many of Aleksandrov's works, including several piano sonatas, such as the Second, the Fourth, the Eighth, and the Eleventh.<sup>158</sup> As the analysis of these sonatas shows, Kokushkin's observations clearly point to a close connection between Aleksandrov's and Rachmaninov's music.

Perhaps the strongest advocate for Aleksandrov as the descendant of Rachmaninov is the Australian composer and musicologist Larry Sitsky. In his study of Russian piano music written between 1900 and 1929, Sitsky designates a separate chapter to discuss the works of Aleksandrov and entitles him "The Post-Rachmaninovan."<sup>159</sup> Sitsky argues that Aleksandrov's style was "first influenced by Rachmaninov, with [only] some aspects taken from both Medtner and Scriabin."<sup>160</sup> Based largely on the examples from the Second and Fourth piano sonatas, he points to the several Rachmaninov-like passages in Aleksandrov's music. Sitsky describes them as "passionate, sonorous...with powerful undercurrent of chromatic deviation," notes Aleksandrov's stretching of Rachmaninov's "habit of sideslips at cadential points, flattening or sharpening functional harmony by semitones," draws attention to the "the openly proclaimed melancholy" and "broad sweeping Rachmaninov-like melody," as well as observing the way that "the device of descending chromatic patterns is adopted for use both melodically and decoratively."<sup>161</sup> Sitsky's detailed exploration of Aleksandrov's musical language in an

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<sup>157</sup> Christoph Flamm, Liner Notes, *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hamish Milne (piano), Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc, 3.

<sup>158</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 226.

<sup>159</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 199.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 201, 204.



attempt to prove the domination of Rachmaninov's style, although not always convincing, presents a valuable resource in revealing the technical explanations for occasional passages in Aleksandrov's pieces that resemble Rachmaninov's style.

### Aleksandrov's Contemporaries: Feinberg and Prokofiev

Aleksandrov and his close friend Samuil Feinberg (1890-1962) met as students at the Moscow Conservatory and maintained their friendship through many years, developing strong ties with each other's families and even living together during the Second World War evacuation. Unlike Aleksandrov, his composer-pianist colleague followed the path of a successful concertizing career, which resulted in a considerably smaller compositional output: a dozen piano sonatas, three piano concertos, and several piano pieces and transcriptions. Nevertheless, Feinberg greatly contributed to Aleksandrov's career by performing his piano works both nationally and abroad.

Aleksandrov had tremendous respect for Feinberg as a composer and went as far as calling him a genius.<sup>162</sup> The qualities that Aleksandrov valued in Feinberg's music reflect many of his own musical principles. In his article published in the *Contemporary Music* journal, Aleksandrov writes, "Feinberg is one of the bravest representatives of the modern musical thinking and speech."<sup>163</sup> He continues by praising his seriousness and artistic integrity, pointing out his expressive melodies, and noting the original and exceptionally difficult pianistic style.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 69.

<sup>163</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 105.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-07.

At the same time, Aleksandrov does not refrain from criticism. He observes that some of the characteristic elements in Feinberg's music, namely the whimsical nervous rhythms and the themes full of inner motion, create an impression of constant unsatisfied yearning and deprive the music of a certain flexibility, imbuing the music with "tragic inevitability," which in its aim to express the inexpressible fails to communicate itself.<sup>165</sup>

As is evident from Aleksandrov's critique stated above, the two composers pursued different goals in their music. Aleksandrov mentions that Feinberg once commented on his compositions as being "beautiful and correct," which was alien to Feinberg's artistic principles.<sup>166</sup> Sitsky marks their stylistic difference in a concise description of Feinberg as "post-Scriabin," opposed to the "post-Rachmaninov" Aleksandrov.<sup>167</sup>

Nevertheless, some researchers observe parallels between the works of both composers. Kokushkin, for instance, notes similarity in the textural and polyphonic development of the musical material, namely the way it mutates into figurations and then is reinstated.<sup>168</sup> Since Feinberg never fully developed his distinctly original composition style, traces of its influence in Aleksandrov's piano works are rather slight. It is quite certain, however, that close personal and professional ties between Feinberg and Aleksandrov benefited both composers.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), a much more original figure in the music world than Feinberg, is another contemporary composer whose influence is strongly felt in

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>166</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 193.

<sup>167</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 204.

<sup>168</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 248.

twentieth century Russian music. Aleksandrov's connection to Prokofiev, though more indirect than to Feinberg, proved to be more meaningful than it initially appeared.

Prokofiev and Aleksandrov met on several occasions after the former returned to Russia from abroad in 1932. Their paths crossed during many professional events at the Moscow Conservatory, where both worked as professors, as well as during the evacuation. There is no evidence, however, that the two composers maintained close correspondence. It is known that Aleksandrov saw Prokofiev as an "exceptionally gifted and versatile composer," as he wrote to his mother in 1927.<sup>169</sup> In another letter to Natalia Polenova from the same year he described Prokofiev as a "remarkable composer with such a vast range of possibilities . . . [who] with his techniques of physiological influence immediately creates a big impression [in the big concert hall], and the audience raves about his music."<sup>170</sup> Aleksandrov liked many of Prokofiev's pieces, including the "Old Grandmother's Tales" and his first piano concerto, but found much of his music "irritating."<sup>171</sup>

Prokofiev's characteristic sarcastic images, ostinato technique, and chromatic counterpoint are found in some of Aleksandrov's piano sonatas, namely the Fourth and the Sixth.<sup>172</sup> This shows that despite his stated irritation with such musical language, Aleksandrov was open to experimenting with the modernistic tools employed by his successful contemporary.

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<sup>169</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 138.

<sup>170</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 95-96.

<sup>171</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 138.

<sup>172</sup> For specific details and examples, see the discussion of Sonata No. 4, Op. 19, and Sonata No. 6, Op. 26.

Evidence of Prokofiev's influence on Aleksandrov's life would remain minimal if it were not for the article published in 1985 by Fyodor Polenov. In this article, Polenov reveals Aleksandrov's poetry, the earlier unknown aspect of the composer's talent. One of the poems, entitled "To the Winner" and dated 1950, is dedicated to Prokofiev. This dedication, however, does not appear as the inscription; Aleksandrov made it known in a private conversation with Polenov, which took place in 1979.<sup>173</sup> The poem metaphorically compares "The Fighter of Tigers" (Prokofiev) and "The Catcher of Trout" (Aleksandrov). In this comparison Aleksandrov not only depicts the fundamental difference between the two artists, but also reveals his true feelings toward Prokofiev. While admitting the latter's somewhat undeserved "victory,"<sup>174</sup> he blames him for treason (his emigration) and for choosing conflict over peace in his music. At the same time, in the poem's final words "Let that stone be shadowed by the pines, And let it forever bear the stamp – the Trout," Aleksandrov stands firmly for his ideals, even when accepting defeat.

Aleksandrov's poem about Prokofiev provides an important insight into both the composer's personality and his outlook on his stronger and more distinguished contemporary. Furthermore, it offers a unique example of the psychological issue of success and failure in the field of music composition.

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<sup>173</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 186.

<sup>174</sup> Clearly, in Aleksandrov's eyes, Prokofiev should not have received world-wide acclaim.

### Shostakovich

An iconic figure in Russian Soviet music, Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) was Aleksandrov's younger contemporary. Although Shostakovich's work was mainly centered in the city of Leningrad, as opposed to Aleksandrov's activities in Moscow, both composers were well aware of each other's compositions and frequently met at concerts and other professional events.

Aleksandrov and Shostakovich met in 1924 in Crimea, where Aleksandrov was vacationing. Aleksandrov recalls that the music of the then eighteen year-old Shostakovich was already very original, refreshing, and intense.<sup>175</sup> The composers became friends and regularly spent time together. After 1936, however, when *Pravda's* renowned article shattered Shostakovich's career, their meetings became less frequent.

Aleksandrov considered Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony to be among his best. In a 1938 review of the symphony's premiere in Leningrad, Aleksandrov names this piece "the most meaningful musical event of past decades."<sup>176</sup> He praises the content and the technical mastery of the work, as well as its ability to grab and hold the listener's attention. In general, Aleksandrov especially admires power, great contrasts, originality, subtle orchestral thinking among many qualities in Shostakovich's music.<sup>177</sup>

Some of Shostakovich's style characteristics are reflected in Aleksandrov's music. The grotesque thematic material of the Sixth Sonata's third movement, for example, inspired Sitsky to exclaim that this music "could have come from

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>176</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 110.

<sup>177</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 40.

Shostakovich,” pointing out its “spiky, sardonic character.”<sup>178</sup> Kokushkin, on the other hand, points out a different type of connection between the two composers by stating that Aleksandrov’s choices in employment of modern techniques are close to those of Shostakovich.<sup>179</sup> Both composers, Kokushkin claims, chose only those aspects of the modern style that did not contradict tradition.<sup>180</sup> In any case, whether Shostakovich’s music influenced Aleksandrov’s from the traditional or modernistic perspective, its most valuable asset for Aleksandrov was, above all, its powerful expressiveness and its ability to captivate the audience.

The group of composers described above covers most of the sources of Russian musical influences on Aleksandrov’s life and career. Many influences were acknowledged by Aleksandrov in numerous interviews and articles; however, the most convincing gesture he made in commemoration of the people behind his inspiration was his 1979 composition of the Five Pieces, Opus 110. Dedicated to the Russian composers who had the greatest influence on him, namely Scriabin, Medtner, Rachmaninov, and Feinberg, each piece of the set, as with Schumann’s *Carnival*, reflects the characteristic traits of each composer. Aleksandrov said that in his composition he tried to “mold the [composers’] images from the sound,” while finding “the points of juxtaposition with the main emotional persona” of each composer.<sup>181</sup> Such a musical tribute shows the extent of Aleksandrov’s immense gratitude and respect for his composer-colleagues and their impact on his work.

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<sup>178</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 208.

<sup>179</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 291.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 200.

### Foreign Influences

In addition to the influences from the Russian composers, Aleksandrov was strongly affected by some foreign trends, particularly impressionism. In fact, interest in French impressionism was a common ground in Aleksandrov's friendship with composer Aleksander Krein, who recollected that they frequently talked about Debussy and Ravel.<sup>182</sup> In addition, many of Aleksandrov's students remember him regularly playing the piano works of these composers.

It is curious, however, that Aleksandrov refrained from giving full acknowledgement of his debt to impressionism. In one of his articles, he writes, "The French school only partially influenced Russian composers, who 'translated into the Russian language' the valuables they received from it."<sup>183</sup> It must be cautioned, though, that in considering Aleksandrov's statement, it is necessary to note the year of the article, 1947, since during that time Zhdanov's strict enforcement of social realism in the arts was at its peak. It then becomes more understandable that Aleksandrov was denying a foreign influence on the music of Russian composers.

In actuality, the impressionistic influence is abundant in Aleksandrov's piano music, particularly in the works written before 1940. As shown in the subsequent discussion, Sonatas No. 3, No. 6, and No. 11 are particularly rich in the examples of passages with foggy and misty effects that recall Debussy and Ravel. Although less

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<sup>182</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 174.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

obvious, such effects also emerge in the Fifth sonata, which according to Sitsky, was even more impressionistic than the previous works.<sup>184</sup>

Based on the evidence from several letters and articles, it is also known that Aleksandrov was quite familiar with the works of the composers from the Second Viennese School. Of its three main representatives (Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern), Aleksandrov was mostly drawn to the music of Webern and recognized his masterful ability to balance the form and the amount of thematic material.<sup>185</sup>

Aleksandrov also studied Schoenberg's dodecaphonic compositions, as recalled by pianist Viktor Bunin, who witnessed the composer learning Schoenberg's *Piano Pieces Opus 25*.<sup>186</sup> He even attempted to compose in this style, but upon showing his twelve-tone piece to a colleague, commented, "This music is like smoking: it is disgusting at first, but once addicted, you find pleasure in it."<sup>187</sup> His attitude toward such a method of composition was most obviously expressed in the title of dodecaphonic piece he composed a few days later, which he called *Merzost' Zapusteniya*, or "The Nasty Emptiness."<sup>188</sup>

To summarize the musical influences that affected Aleksandrov's compositional work, two main areas should be distinguished. One springs from Taneyev, who pointed Aleksandrov in the direction of Russian traditionalism, which in turn motivated him to admire Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, and Medtner. Zhilyaev, on the other hand, encouraged creativity and innovation, which resulted in Aleksandrov's great interest in

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<sup>184</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 205.

<sup>185</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 190.

<sup>186</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 183.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 184.



the work of Scriabin, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich, as well as the music of French impressionism and other foreign trends. In addition, Feinberg and Rachmaninov played an important role in promoting Aleksandrov's music.

Although Aleksandrov's mentors and colleagues were influencing him, the composer was also forming his own artistic principles and values, which were mainly based on his philosophical aspirations. Aleksandrov recollects that he was always preoccupied with the questions of existence, the meaning of life, the meaning of art, and the mystery of the human condition.<sup>189</sup> In 1906 this pursuit even led to his enrollment in the School of Philosophy at Moscow University, where he studied until 1910. Yet, it was precisely philosophy that motivated Aleksandrov's decision to dedicate himself to the study of music. In fact, one particular work, namely Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, in which music was viewed as the highest expression of will, affected Aleksandrov most strongly.<sup>190</sup> This work, along with the studies of Hegel, Goethe, Spinoza, and Kant, inspired Aleksandrov's vision of music as the expression of the essence of things. As shown in the later part of the study, this and other philosophical ideas significantly influenced Aleksandrov's treatment of form and choice of content in his music.

Opposing influences, as well as philosophical convictions, stimulate the question of Aleksandrov's own position as a traditional and modern composer, as his career became more established. The next step in exploring Aleksandrov's style aims to examine this issue.

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<sup>189</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 146.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

### Traditionalism versus Modernism

The duality of tradition and modernity in Aleksandrov's composition is derived in part from conflicting musical trends in the surrounding musical atmosphere of the early twentieth century, and in part from the above-mentioned influences on Aleksandrov's own personal and professional life. The composer himself comments on this duality in his piano works by stating that before his Eighth Piano Sonata all odd-numbered sonatas reflect the modernistic line, while all even-numbered ones follow the Medtner's, or more traditional, line.<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, the juxtaposition of contemporary and traditional trends became a characteristic trait of his style, as noted by critical commentary.

In the 1920s, when Aleksandrov was beginning his career as a promising young composer, the critics first observed a mixture of both new and old tendencies in his works, which made it difficult to assign him a distinct stylistic position. As early as 1923, Zhilyaev comments that Aleksandrov's "strange mixture of influences from Medtner, Scriabin, and Debussy is so far one of the most characteristic features of his work."<sup>192</sup> In 1925 Victor Beliaev finds it challenging to label Aleksandrov as progressive or traditional, as he writes:

Looking at Aleksandrov's music, at first sight it seems that he should be regarded as the composer holding the traditional positions in music, but more attentive evaluation reveals that such classification does not cover the breadth of his work. After an accurate analysis of Aleksandrov's music, one realizes that it is not appropriate to categorize his style; it is rather more compelling to place him in a separate platform.<sup>193</sup>

Finally, in 1927, Leonid Sabaneyev confirms Aleksandrov's ambiguous position:

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>192</sup> Zhilyaev, "Anatoly Aleksandrov and His Third Piano Sonata," 33.

<sup>193</sup> Victor Beliaev, "Miaskovsky, Geodike, Aleksandrov," *Contemporary Music*, no. 8 (1925): 27-28.

Aleksandrov possesses the typical traits of the academy and the salon at the same time. He is an unquestionable master of style and wields the technique of composition perfectly... Being classed somewhere in the middle, neither among innovators nor among extreme conservatives, he enjoys comparative popularity on both sides.<sup>194</sup>

An investigation into Aleksandrov's convictions on both modern and traditional tendencies reveals that he valued both. His high respect for tradition is evident in his statement where he defines it as "what remains alive from the principles of the past."<sup>195</sup> It is also known that Aleksandrov welcomed novelty; he accepted the avant-garde movement and positively viewed polytonality, which he employed in his compositions to create fantastic colors. Moreover, regardless of his personal opinion on existing trends, he always taught them to his students in Moscow Conservatory's composition class entitled "The Newest Achievements in the Field of Harmony," otherwise known as "The Modern Harmony Course."<sup>196</sup>

Aleksandrov's active involvement in the Association of Contemporary Music is additional evidence of his ardent interest in modern musical events. Nevertheless, he had a two-fold view on novelty in music. Kokushkin explains that "If such novelty contributed to the development and enrichment of the traditions, Aleksandrov approved of it, and if it completely broke from them, he denied it."<sup>197</sup>

This point is well illustrated in Aleksandrov's view of dodecaphonic music. As previously described, after trying to work with the twelve-tone system, he concluded that it was not a viable way to create music. Moreover, he considered it "decomposition and

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<sup>194</sup> Sabaneyev, *Modern Russian Composers*, 233.

<sup>195</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 200.

<sup>196</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 225.

<sup>197</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 25.

the result of human imagination,” as opposed to the European system that developed historically and naturally from the elements of folk music.<sup>198</sup> Such a strong opinion, however, was not caused by mere personal antipathy, but rather well-reasoned judgment. For example, Aleksandrov found the twelve-tone method of composition quite limiting. He clarifies his view in the following statement:

Composition technique in atonal music creates a vision of organized improvisation, but it is merely a seeming resemblance, since in its basic principle lies a different, non-improvisational nature, which offers not a choice of variants, but a combinatory technique. The twelve-tone method does not provide the composer with the opportunity to include a musical thought of a different nature, since it belongs outside the given system.<sup>199</sup>

In addition to the limitation of the variety of musical ideas, Aleksandrov felt that the system restricted the magnitude of the composer’s musical thoughts. He states, “In the atonal system one can compose only pieces in small form, because the large ones tend to fall apart into small fragments. Thus, the composer cannot depict big thoughts in this music.”<sup>200</sup>

Aleksandrov’s views regarding modernism in music, particularly dodecaphony, show that despite his thorough awareness of progressive trends, he was firmly rooted in the principles of traditional musical values. These values underlined the entire course of his compositional career and in 1973 were confirmed by the composer’s own words:

Up to this day I essentially stand on the traditions of the classics. I frequently use modern tools, but only if they do not contradict the principles of ‘classicism’ in the broad sense of the word. In my own work, as well as in the work with students, I accept and believe that the XX century has brought much usefulness to

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<sup>198</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 120.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

the musician's arsenal. However, I am not in any case a supporter of destruction of classical traditions.<sup>201</sup>

It is important to stress that Aleksandrov's position as a traditionalist did not result from choosing conservative thinking over the progressive; rather, it evolved from his philosophical convictions about music. Aleksandrov firmly believed that the basic laws of musical logic are universal, that is, common for the people of all nations. However, he admitted the possibility of bending these laws to accommodate individual preferences or to bring out the musical elements particular to the composer's nation.<sup>202</sup> Specifically speaking, it did not matter for Aleksandrov which tools the composer employs; so long as his or her art does not break the basic laws of musical logic and is based on true intuition, not on mere intellect, so that it can enlighten the real world of music. In other words, whether the techniques are traditional or modern, if they aim to open the "true world of music" in a piece, they result in a worthy composition.<sup>203</sup>

Although Aleksandrov was not clear about his definition of the "true world of music," it is still possible to deduce from his philosophy that his view of tradition in music was tied to a higher understanding of natural principles in art. As mentioned earlier, the search for the essence of these principles was Aleksandrov's lifelong quest and to a great degree influenced his artistic choices.

In summary, this portion of the study shows that various influences on Aleksandrov's life pointed him to certain choices concerning his career and, more importantly, his musical ideology. Although he often found himself confronted by

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<sup>201</sup> M. Seryozhin, "A Visit to An. Aleksandrov," *Soviet Music*, no. 5 (1973): 136.

<sup>202</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 9-10.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

opposing tendencies, Aleksandrov's strong philosophical background helped him to clarify his own convictions, and while the critics could not pinpoint his stylistic identity, he kept his position as a seeker of the "true world of music," thus transcending both modernism and traditionalism.

The points made in the above discussion serve as valuable background for understanding the work of Anatoly Aleksandrov, and many of them are revisited in the following chapter, which discusses the composer's fourteen piano sonatas. Along with introducing each work to the reader, this chapter covers Aleksandrov's stylistic evolution and illustrates how various influences were gradually combined to form his individual style.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **ANATOLY ALEKSANDROV'S PIANO SONATAS**

Before beginning to discuss Aleksandrov's piano sonatas, it is helpful to briefly overview the general development of Russian piano music before the twentieth century. Understanding the groundwork in this genre in Russia allows a more comprehensive understanding of Aleksandrov's sonatas place in music history.

#### **Piano Music In Russia**

The art of piano music in Russia has a relatively short history, especially when compared to its Western analogue. Its development from the first printed examples dating from the 1780s to its peak in the beginning of the twentieth century spans barely two hundred years. Yet this time was sufficient for major developments and, as a result, leaving pianists with valuable and durable masterpieces enjoyed by millions throughout the world.

Before Russian piano music started to develop its unique identity in the second half of the nineteenth century, its output was of limited artistic significance. Many composers who cultivated this genre were focused mainly on composing vocal music and opera, as evident in the work of Dmitri Bortnyanski, Alexander Gurilev, Alexander Alyabyev, Alexander Dargomyzhsky, and Mikhail Glinka. Despite the lack of major contributions to the repertoire, however, piano compositions started to show distinct features that later became the basis in more highly developed music. Russian researcher

Alexander Alekseev, author of the three significant monographs about Russian piano music, points out the great influence of vocal music on the piano works, observing that by the first half of the nineteenth century the piano style began to include the typical traits of the national art, particularly lyricism, and the melodic and polyphonic development that grew out of Russian folk song tradition.<sup>204</sup>

During the 1860s the piano music grew and matured substantially, largely due to the efforts of the Rubinstein brothers (mainly Anton Rubinstein) and the composers of the Mighty Five. The establishment of conservatories and musical societies led not only to a more vibrant and active concert life, but to a higher level of education and performance, which popularized piano music among audiences and composers. Moreover, taking into account the turbulent social and artistic situation described earlier in the study, the leading composers saw the piano with its rich expressive possibilities as a tool for conveying important progressive democratic ideas of the time.<sup>205</sup> All that is national in Russian art – the themes of nature, the reflection of reality in a person's life, embellished with folk song and dance – flourished in the piano music of this time and culminated in the work of Tchaikovsky. Finally, many piano compositions, such as Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Balakirev's *Islamey*, and Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, quickly became internationally acclaimed and included in the repertoire of such renowned European pianists as Liszt, Tausig, and von Bülow.

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<sup>204</sup> Aleksandr Alekseev, *Russkaia fortepiannaia muzyka ot istokov do vershin tvorchestva: Predglinski period, Glinka i ego sovremeniki, A. Rubinshtein, Moguchaia Kuchka* (Moskva: Akademiya Nauk SSSR, 1963), 115.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 116.



By the end of the nineteenth century almost all composers were creating works for the piano. In Petersburg, Anatoly Liadov (1855-1914), Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936) and Sergei Liapunov (1859-1924) were extensively composing piano pieces in various genres. In Moscow, Sergei Taneyev (1856-1915) and Anton Arensky (1861-1906) were the leading composers in this field. Under the strong influence of Tchaikovsky, these composers explored the theme of depicting the personal inner world of emotions; thus, they preferred the genre of miniature. As the twentieth century approached, however, a shift to larger forms took place. Alekseev explains that this was in part due to the “evolution of the composers’ creative thinking and broadening of their creative concepts.”<sup>206</sup> Unfortunately, the repertoire produced by these Russian composers, although abundant and varied, was not of lasting value. Musicologists such as Leonard, Maes, and Alekseev agree that the main problem in this case was the composers’ overly academic preoccupation with structure and texture, which resulted in a lack of fresh thought, spontaneity, and inner tension in the music. Alekseev bluntly calls these compositions “faceless and without inner meaning.”<sup>207</sup>

Following this hiatus in the development of piano music in Russia, a younger generation of composers, namely Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943), Alexander Scriabin (1872-1914), and Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951), raised the genre of larger-scaled works to new heights. Having studied with their older masters – more successful as pedagogues than composers – they reinstated the achievements and traditions of the past and in their individual ways wrote music that had an impact on contemporary audiences. The

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<sup>206</sup> Aleksandr Alekseev, *Russkaia Fortepiannaia Muzyka: Konets XIX-nachalo XX veka* (Moskva: Nauka, 1969), 65.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 67.

influence of these three artists on the younger generation of composers, mainly through the “heightened emotional temperature” in their works, was highly significant.<sup>208</sup>

A slightly younger Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) and Nikolai Miaskovsky (1881-1950) continued the development of the genre. These composers, along with many others, took full advantage of the dynamic social and artistic scene in the beginning of the twentieth century, as described earlier, and created a multitude of original piano works, many of which remain in the repertoire of concert pianists worldwide.

After 1917, during the time of the Soviet socialism in Russia, the repertoire was enriched by the works of Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), Dmitri Kabalevsky (1904-1987), and Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978). In the second half of the twentieth century, however, fewer composers created original piano compositions. Among most successful authors in this genre today are Rodion Shchedrin (b. 1932), Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931), and the Ukrainian Russian Nikolai Kapustin (b. 1937).

#### Anatoly Aleksandrov’s Piano Music: The Composer-Pianist

Piano music, along with vocal music, is the most significant genre in Aleksandrov’s work. The total number of his compositions for piano exceeds 150, not counting numerous pieces for pedagogical purposes. The total output includes both programmatic and non-programmatic music works and consists of many piano miniatures, cycles, large-form works (fourteen sonatas), and a piano concerto. Aleksandrov started composing as early as 1901, when he was thirteen years old, and it

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<sup>208</sup> This expression belongs to B. V. Asafiev, quoted from Mikhail Druskin, *Istoriya i sovremennost': Stat'i o muzyke* (Leningrad: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1960), 268.

was a piano piece that he distinctly remembered as his first composition.<sup>209</sup> He continued to write for piano throughout his entire life; Aleksandrov's last solo piano work, *Visions*, Opus 111, dates from 1979, three years before his death.

It was only natural for Aleksandrov to be more interested in the piano than in other instruments. When one remembers his mother's career as a concert pianist, as well as the first piano lessons young Anatoly received from her, it becomes clear that becoming a pianist would be a likely path for him. It was not, however, fascination with the instrument or with playing it that initially attracted Aleksandrov. His most exciting activity in his early years was four-hand readings of symphonic and operatic works by Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Richard Strauss, and Wagner.<sup>210</sup> Thus, the piano for him was a window to the boundless world of music; it was a tool that helped him discover not only many masterworks, but also his own creative abilities.

Later in life, the study of piano and composition was always undertaken simultaneously with equal intensity, and in fact, Aleksandrov confirmed through his writings that he began his compositional work with piano music precisely because he was learning to play the piano and could perform his pieces, an activity that he enjoyed very much.<sup>211</sup> Although Aleksandrov admitted making slower progress in his piano studies due to his greater interest in composition,<sup>212</sup> he achieved a high level of performance that was worthy of admission to the special "virtuoso" program at the Moscow Conservatory; at his entrance examination, he played Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C-sharp minor (from

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<sup>209</sup> The "Funeral March" mentioned earlier.

<sup>210</sup> From Aleksandrov's autobiography in Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 21, 31.

<sup>211</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 236.

<sup>212</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 21.

volume I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*), Brahms's Rhapsody in G minor, Medtner's Sonata-Fairy-Tale, and Scriabin's Poem in F-Sharp major Op. 32 along with the Preludes Op. 15.<sup>213</sup> As his performing skills improved, so did his sense of piano texture and his interpretation of various piano forms.<sup>214</sup>

Being an excellent pianist undoubtedly helped Aleksandrov not only to create, but also to promote his music. He composed exclusively at the piano and frequently performed his own works. This was particularly advantageous because by approximately the 1920s pianists were expected to compose as did "chefs to create their own recipes," to quote Stephen Hough, the author of the forward to Robert Rimm's monograph about composer-pianists.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, the concert scene was full of composer-performers, including Rachmaninov, Prokofiev, Scriabin, and Medtner. Aleksandrov's numerous presentations of his compositions in public are worthy of this tradition.

Aleksandrov was very aware of the coloristic and virtuosic possibilities of the instrument. He was convinced that the piano had limitless expressive capabilities because it permits one to imagine anything.<sup>216</sup> In a conversation recorded in 1974 he even states that the timbre of the piano is not important because this instrument has a "certain fantastical multitude of timbres" that does not exist in reality, but only in one's imagination.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 12.

<sup>214</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 236.

<sup>215</sup> Robert Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and the Eight* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>216</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 56.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

Anatoly Aleksandrov's knowledge of the piano and skill in composition is reflected most fully in his fourteen piano sonatas. What is more important, however, is that these works represent each stage of Aleksandrov's lifelong journey as an artist. They embody the development of his philosophy and attitude toward music and surrounding events, experiments with form, style, and other expressive musical tools, and the crystallization of his personality. The following survey of the sonatas reveals this process and aids in discovering the core of Aleksandrov's art and personality.

### Aleksandrov and the Sonata

During the beginning of the twentieth century many Russian composers favored the genre of the piano sonata. Aleksandrov's older contemporaries explored this field extensively, creating many beautiful masterpieces; although Rachmaninov composed only two sonatas, Medtner and Scriabin left a more sizable output of fourteen and ten sonatas respectively.

The younger generation of composers who worked contemporaneously with Aleksandrov continued this tradition. Miaskovsky and Prokofiev composed nine published sonatas each, and Feinberg created twelve works in this genre. Aleksandrov's own fourteen sonatas should be included in this list.

The reason behind the popularity of the sonata genre among Russian composers can be found in Alekseev's point of view. He explains this phenomenon as quite understandable since the genre "possessed vast potential possibilities for the musical embodiment of subjects that were exciting composers' imagination, particularly the

disparity of life and characteristic tensions of the time.”<sup>218</sup> Indeed, the composers of all eras have found a way to express themselves through the format of a sonata. Furthermore, aside from its initial potential, the genre also underwent a great development through its history, and by the early 1900s it reached a high level of modern and efficient musical form favored by many composers.

Aleksandrov, too, admitted his preference for the sonata form. During his conversations with Kokushkin he explains, “At first, I used to compose smaller works in the typical simple duple, triple, or other forms. I started writing sonatas later. It is a very comfortable form that shows the development of musical thoughts while allowing their infinite variation. That is why it is very pleasant to use it as a means of expression.”<sup>219</sup> Although the convenience and comfort of using the sonata form were important to Aleksandrov, there was a more profound reason why he consistently employed this form, related to his philosophical views of music, content, and form.

As mentioned earlier, influenced by Schopenhauer, Aleksandrov viewed music as an organism that develops according to natural principles. According to him, this is characteristic of any classical form and especially of the sonata form, which gives music the character of an organism that naturally exists in nature and evolves into a beautiful work of art independently of its creator.<sup>220</sup> In order to reflect this process in music successfully, however, one must know the principles of this organism’s development. Thus, the sonata form with its laws of thematic development became an ideal vehicle for Aleksandrov’s musical philosophy.

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<sup>218</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 33.

<sup>219</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 132.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Another issue that critically concerned Aleksandrov was the question of content and form in a musical composition. He firmly believed that content must always be present in a piece, and that music cannot exist without content.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, there must be unity of content and form. He says, “When content and form are separated in a piece, it is a bad piece,” because it is obvious that the composer merely follows a formula.<sup>222</sup> While according to Aleksandrov, the scheme of the sonata form is fundamentally the same, it may take different shapes, and only through individual treatment of the form in each case can the unity of form and content be achieved.<sup>223</sup> In this way Aleksandrov views sonata form not only as a structure, but as a tactical strategy that differs from one work to the next.

Content for Aleksandrov meant a certain inner musical image that a composer wants to depict. This musical image consists of a specific tangible image and an emotion at the same time; thus, it is objective and subjective at once. He explains that the musical image is “more than the actual reality; it contains an object, a mood, and an emotion.”<sup>224</sup> The idea of music transcending reality once again lies in Aleksandrov’s philosophical convictions that were likely influenced by not only Schopenhauer, but also Scriabin.

While welcoming and employing modernistic trends in his composition of the sonata, Aleksandrov remained a traditionalist in many aspects. He called a composition a sonata only if it had a sonata scheme, although he cautioned, “When in the sonata the

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>222</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 66.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 116.

scheme dominates, it is considered a bad form because form should be natural and dependent on the content.”<sup>225</sup>

Aleksandrov was convinced that sonata has to be connected with a tonal plan, since the “Conflict is directly and elementary linked to the tonal system with its stable and unstable moments.”<sup>226</sup> Regarding the thematic development, too, Aleksandrov believed that the theme should be stated in the main key before it can be developed by modulating or other manipulations. He argued that in its initial state, the theme should be very clear to the listener, similarly to the drama, where it is necessary to show the original situation before the further unfolding events can be understood.<sup>227</sup> He also encouraged retention of the old-fashioned period structure of a theme, where the musical thought is expressed in the most complete way.<sup>228</sup> Finally, his frequent reference to Beethoven’s piano sonatas as the highest quality examples of this genre furnishes proof of Aleksandrov’s devotion to traditional musical ideals.

When considering the totality of Aleksandrov’s piano works, one notes the equal importance of the miniatures and sonatas in his output. The question arises as to his views on the issue of program music versus absolute music. It is clear from Aleksandrov’s conversations that he regarded absolute music to be superior to program music, even though he wrote many programmatic pieces. “Non-program music,” he said, “is broader than program music because the program limits its meaning.”<sup>229</sup> Besides, his philosophy

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 116.



of music's natural development led to the conviction that music should unfold according to its own principles, regardless of the program.

Aleksandrov was not, however, opposed to the idea of program. Several of his sonatas contain literary associations in the form of an epigraph or a commentary. He was concerned, however, that listeners understand the music and its composer's ideas rather than the mere program.<sup>230</sup> That is why Aleksandrov's program does not seem to impose a certain story or image upon a listener; instead, it is the composer's remark of a personal experience connected to the piece.

As seen from the discussion above, practical and philosophical reasons led Aleksandrov to a difficult challenge – to write compositions in the sonata format, but in such way that the content is not overshadowed by the scheme and the music is not overshadowed by the content.

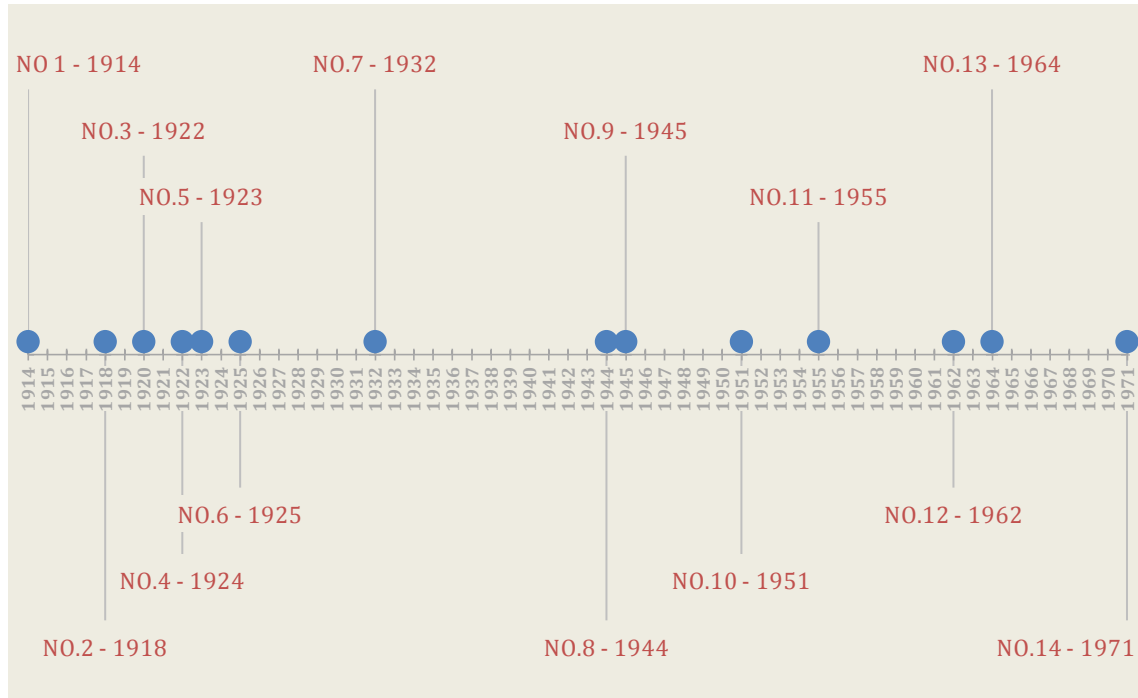
### The Fourteen Sonatas

The composition of piano sonatas extended relatively evenly throughout Anatoly Aleksandrov's life, the first one dating from 1914, when he was twenty-six years old, and the last from 1971, when the composer was eighty-three. The timeline below shows that the sonatas can be organized into several groups (see fig 5.1). The early Sonata No. 1 stands as representative of Aleksandrov's student work. Sonatas No. 2 through No. 7 constitute a group of initial post-revolutionary period compositions and date from the Transition Stage described earlier. After a twelve-year break, which was most certainly caused by political and socio-historical disturbances, especially the disruption of World

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 67.

War II, Aleksandrov resumed his work in this genre. The division of the sonatas written after 1944 is more difficult. Observing the stylistic evolution of these works, Kokushkin suggests two groups: Sonatas No. 8 through No. 10, reflecting Aleksandrov's turn to the current Soviet issues of the time, and the remaining No. 11 through No. 14 as representative of the mature composer's late style.<sup>231</sup>



**Figure 5.1.** The timeline of Aleksandrov's sonatas.

All of Aleksandrov's sonatas were performed and published shortly after their completion. The table 5.1 below shows the grouped sonatas' first performance and publishing information, along with the indication and year of their revisions.

<sup>231</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 109.

**Table 5.1.** Revision, first performance, and publishing information for Anatoly Aleksandrov's piano sonatas

No.	Opus	Year Composed	Year Revised	First Performance: Year/Pianist/Place	Publishing Information: Publisher/Year
1.	Op. 4	1914		1916/S. Polockaya-Emcova/Petersburg	Gosmuzizdat RSFSR/1922
2.	Op. 12	1918		1919/Composer/Moscow	Gosmuzizdat RSFSR/1922
3.	Op. 18	1920	1956, 1967	1921/Composer/Moscow	Muzsektor Gosizdata/1922
4.	Op. 19	1922	1954	1922/Composer/Moscow	Muzsektor Gosizdata/1923
5.	Op. 22	1923	1938	1924/Composer/Moscow	Universal, Vienna/1925
6.	Op. 26	1925		1926/Composer/Moscow	Muzsektor Gosizdata/1926
7.	Op. 42	1932		1933/V. Belov/Moscow	Iskusstvo/1938
8.	Op. 50	1939-1944		1946/B. Goldfeder/Moscow	Muzgiz/1946
9.	Op. 61	1945		1950/V. Nosov/Moscow	Muzgiz/1947
10.	Op. 72	1951		1951/I. Mihnovskiy/Moscow	Muzgiz/1952
11.	Op. 81	1955		1956/T. Nikolayeva/Moscow	Muzgiz/1957
12.	Op. 87	1962		1963/M. Fyodorova/Moscow	Muzgiz/1963
13.	Op. 90	1964		1968/V. Bunin/Moscow	Sov. Kompozitor/1968
14.	Op. 97	1967-1971		1971/Composer/Moscow	Sov. Kompozitor /1973

The second group of sonatas is notable for several reasons. One is the number of revised works. Considering the historic-political and cultural situation during the 1920s, it is particularly interesting to observe that Aleksandrov chose to rework the sonatas from this group. As follows in the discussion of the individual sonatas, the musical language in these particular compositions was the most influenced by the daring modernistic tendencies of the time. It is very likely that the tight cultural regime of social realism after 1928 urged Aleksandrov to “revisit” these pieces.

Another important observation about this group of sonatas is that all the compositions but one were first performed by the composer. The performance of his own works was an important aspect in Aleksandrov's career and was initially encouraged by Rachmaninov. According to Aleksandrov's recollections, the two composers met several times in Moscow before Rachmaninov's departure abroad. Among other advice the older master offered to the young Aleksandrov was to organize concerts of his own compositions featuring his own performances,<sup>232</sup> which proved to be a great motivation for Aleksandrov. He took Rachmaninov's suggestion and frequently performed his piano sonatas throughout his career, including the memorable premiere of his last piano sonata at the age of eighty-three.

Many sonatas initially reflected a prescribed program with such titles as *Sonata-Fairy-Tale* (No. 1 and No. 13), *Sonata-Fantasia* (No. 11), and separate movement titles, as well as epigraphs from poetry. Most of the programmatic associations, however, were suppressed from the published scores, mainly due to Aleksandrov's concerns about program music described earlier.

Eight out of the fourteen sonatas include dedications. Family members, colleagues, friends, mentors, performers, all who in one way or another contributed to Aleksandrov's life and work, were the dedicatees of his music. In some cases the dedications are directly connected to the music of the sonata, namely its stylistic and emotional content. From this standpoint, they may be as significant as Aleksandrov's program.

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<sup>232</sup> Blok, A. N. *Aleksandrov: Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma*, 89.

The following section of the study explores each sonata individually and aims to discover the essence of Aleksandrov's art: his compositional techniques and inspirations behind them. At the same time, by emphasizing general characteristics of each sonata group, the chapter demonstrates the changes that occurred in the composer's style over the course of his life.

Sonata No. 1, Opus 4 (1914), F-Sharp Minor

*"Sonata-Fairy-Tale"*

Known by its Russian title "Sonata-Skazka" or German "Märchen-Sonate," Aleksandrov's First Piano Sonata was composed during his studies at the Moscow Conservatory. Aleksandrov remembers being so inspired and taken by the process of creating this sonata that not even the turbulent consequences of war broke his concentration. His daughter recalls him telling her, "In 1914 the war had begun [World War I]. Everyone was screaming, running around, worrying! But I was absorbed by one of my sonatas. Thus, I did not care about the war or the papers. I did not even go out on the streets until I was finished with the sonata."<sup>233</sup>

During the period of composition of the sonata, Aleksandrov was also working on his first string quartet, which, as mentioned earlier, was awarded the Honorable Mention by Medtner and Rachmaninov at the Moscow Chamber Society Competition. Aleksandrov recalls that although the judges liked the music, the composition's technical imperfections prevented them from granting it the First Prize.<sup>234</sup> Despite the loss,

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<sup>233</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 209.

<sup>234</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 87.

however, Aleksandrov's name quickly became known among music circles. On November 30, 1916 in Petersburg both the piano sonata and the string quartet were premiered at the first concert organized specifically to feature solely Aleksandrov's music. The composer, mobilized in the Army at the time, was unable to perform the sonata himself, but because of the importance of the event, was released by the officials for that day, allowing him to be present at the concert.<sup>235</sup>

The First Sonata combines elements from the traditional sonata writing, contemporary influences, and personal style. It is a one-movement piece, based in part on Liszt's model. Delicate rocking, calm narrative lyricism, and intriguing rhythms permeate the composition's character. The tonal relationship within the exposition is conventional: the first section is in F-sharp minor, and the second is in A major. Although the two themes can be distinguished, the intonations and rhythmic pattern of the first theme shape the accompaniment of the second (see Examples 5.1 and 5.2). Thus, the predominance of this theme throughout the piece makes the sonata monothematic.

The influence of Scriabin, shared by most composers of the time, is evident in the one-movement structure, texture, and the harmonic language, particularly in the mystic-impressionistic and the successive seventh and ninth chords, characteristic of the early and the middle periods of Scriabin's music. The title and the genre of the composition both point to the influence of Medtner, who wrote many sonatas (also fourteen) and numerous "Fairy-Tales."

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<sup>235</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 13.

Example 5.1. Sonata No. 1, mm. 1-7



Example 5.2. Sonata No. 1, mm. 25-29



Despite these influences, the sonata contains several traits of Aleksandrov's own style which emerges more distinctly in later compositions. One such trait is the characteristic quintuplet figuration that is woven into the entire sonata like a leitmotiv. Not only does the effect of this rhythm contribute to the ambiguous and improvised feel of the music, but it also reflects the metric rhythm of Russian folk poetry:  $\sim \sim | \sim \sim \sim$ <sup>236</sup> The persistent rocking motion of this pattern results in a haunting ostinato that permeates the fabric of the piece.

The sonata is also full of polyrhythmic passages, such as 5 against 2, 3, or 4, along with other combinations. Interestingly, during the previous summer of 1913, Aleksandrov was studying with Emile Jaques-Dalcroze at his institute in Hellerau near Dresden, Germany. As seen from his letters to his wife Nina, the rhythmic complexity

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 111.

and coordination of the exercises during Dalcroze's instruction was both challenging and motivating for Aleksandrov.<sup>237</sup> Although the composer does not point out the direct influence of these classes on his composition, his teacher at the Conservatory Sergei Vasilenko believes that the First Sonata's convoluted rhythmic patterns and 5/8 meter were the result of the study with Dalcroze.<sup>238</sup>

Aleksandrov's characteristic melodic style, too, is evident in this sonata. His melodies are built from simple short motives, often derived from fragments of the first theme and appearing in different voices, as in the second theme (Ex. 5.2), and sometimes appearing in augmentation, diminution, or in counterpoint, evidence of Aleksandrov's extensive use of polyphony. Kokushkin is one of the first modern critics to note Aleksandrov's creative melodic technique of "crafty interconnection and variation" in thematic development.<sup>239</sup> This characteristic becomes increasingly pronounced in each sonata.

Aleksandrov's first sonata was received well by professional music circles. The influence of Medtner was brought up by many critics, such as Belyaev, Alekseev, Kokushkin, and acknowledged by Aleksandrov himself. Interestingly enough, Medtner considered the work to be a synthesis of the creative influences of Mussorgsky and Scriabin.<sup>240</sup>

The individuality Aleksandrov's lyricism and creative thematic development was also noticed. Victor Beliaev remarks that "it showed the value of composer's creative

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<sup>237</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 77-82.

<sup>238</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 85.

<sup>239</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 242.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.



nature, who, while influenced by Medtner on the outside, gave the work a powerful impression and great individuality.”<sup>241</sup> Aleksandrov’s composition teacher Vasilenko points out the sonata’s strong ties with the Russian tradition, its folk narrative color, and skillful development of the first theme.<sup>242</sup> Among Western researchers, Larry Sitsky comments on the sonata as follows: “A fluid, improvised feel, a soft impressionistic palette, a gentle instability of tonality that is never harsh, all characterize this work.”<sup>243</sup>

Some reports were more critical, like Aleksandrov’s former teacher Zhilyaev’s remark that the piece was “charming, but youthfully simple.”<sup>244</sup> Aleksandrov, too, was not satisfied with the piece. In conversations with Alekseev he admitted that the First sonata is “immature” and that it does not combine Scriabinistic traits with the Russian folk-tale elements in a natural way.<sup>245</sup> He also expressed a similar concern in a conversation with Kokushkin, this time mentioning the unnatural mixture of Medtner narration and Scriabin elegance.<sup>246</sup> These concerns resulted in a complete reworking of the sonata fifty years after its original composition. In 1964 this new version became the Sonata No. 13, Opus 90. As Aleksandrov explains in the commentary to the sonata’s new edition, the only unchanged musical materials from the first “Sonata-Fairy-Tale” are the main theme, the beginning of the connecting theme, and a part of the coda.<sup>247</sup> The composer also retained the original dedication to his brother Vladimir.

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<sup>241</sup> Beliaev, *Anatoli Nikolaevich Aleksandrov*, 10.

<sup>242</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 112.

<sup>243</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 204.

<sup>244</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 245.

<sup>245</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 37.

<sup>246</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 112.

<sup>247</sup> Anatoliy Nikolaevich Aleksandrov, *Sochineniya, dlya fortepiano* (Moskva: Muzyka, 1966),

### Early Post-October Sonatas: No. 2 - No. 7

The group of Aleksandrov's sonatas written between 1918 and 1932 constitutes the composer's most diverse work in this genre. In these sonatas, great variety in image content and structure results in a bold juxtaposition of lyrical and passionate themes presented in dark colors and grotesque episodes. This led to an involved and expanded musical language characterized by complex harmonic movement, intense chromatic alterations, and thick textures.

Stylistic tendencies in the sonatas of this period exemplify Aleksandrov's use of a variety of elements from contemporary trends, including modernism, impressionism, and expressionism. Observing this phenomenon in Aleksandrov's style, Kokushkin names this phase of the composer's work as the period of artistic experimentation.<sup>248</sup>

Considering the turbulent artistic environment during the early post-revolutionary stage in the history of the Soviet Russia, Aleksandrov's creative experimentation is understandable. As previously discussed, the musicians' aspirations to create a new musical culture for the new society urged them to use the most innovative techniques. Moreover, this tendency was promoted by the government. Schwarz explains, "In truth, the Leninist Revolution encouraged experimentation in the arts, including music. During the first fifteen years, modernism was fully explored through the activities of the ACM, which flourished in Petrograd and Moscow during the 1920s."<sup>249</sup> He further calls this

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<sup>248</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 34.

<sup>249</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 7.

phase the “period of unchained experimentation,” where “everything was tried – music that was epigonal or futuristic, proletarian or esoteric, programmatic or absolute.”<sup>250</sup>

The genre of the piano sonata during the 1920s consistently flourished among Russian composers. Alekseev observes two general types of sonatas cultivated by the composers throughout the second decade of the twentieth century: the “conflict lyric-dramatic and tragic sonatas,” of which the main representatives were Aleksandrov, Feinberg, and Miaskovsky, and sonatas based on the pre-romantic traditions with less apparent conflict aspect, as represented in the works of Prokofiev and Stravinsky.<sup>251</sup> Alekseev notes that despite this experimentation, Aleksandrov’s artistic essence remained in the lyrical sphere.

#### Sonata No. 2, Opus 12 (1918), D Minor

Aleksandrov’s Second Piano Sonata opened the Soviet stage of the composer’s work. Although there is no immediate connection between revolutionary events and the music, the composition, as suggested by Alekseev, can be perceived as composer’s sincere emotional response to new social conditions.<sup>252</sup> Indeed, at first hearing this sonata gives the impression of uplifting and passionate expression, in which the battle is overcome, and positive forces triumph in the end.

The programmatic inscription at the head of the manuscript confirms the optimistic concept envisioned by Aleksandrov. It comes from Heinrich Heine’s poem in the collection “Book of Songs” and has no title. Of the poem’s two stanzas only the first

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>251</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 33-35, 56.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 37.

one is included in the inscription. Listed below is the first stanza of the original poem, the Russian text of the inscription, and the English translation (see table 5.2). The essence of the poem is a hymn to life and happiness. After reading it, it becomes clear what dramatic idea Aleksandrov had in mind when composing the sonata, and why the emotions of exuberant joy prevail in its music. But this was only the beginning; Aleksandrov was so taken with the idea of celebrating the beauty and goodness of life and overcoming sadness with joy that it became “the mission of his entire work,” to quote Kokushkin.<sup>253</sup> This idea is later expressed in the Fourth, Eighth, and Tenth Piano Sonatas, as well as numerous pieces in other genres.

**Table 5.2.** Heinrich Heine’s poem found in the inscription to Aleksandrov’s Sonata No. 2

Original Text in German (H. Heine)	Inscription Text in Russian (author unknown)	Translation in English (Emily Ezust <sup>254</sup> )
Herz, mein Herz, sei nicht beklommen, und ertrage dein Geschick, neuer Frühling gibt zurück, was der Winter dir genommen.	Сердце, сердце, будь как было, Не склоняйся пред судьбой, Всё назад придёт с весной, Что зимой ты схоронило.	Heart, my heart, don't be oppressed, and bear your fate: a new Spring will give back what Winter has taken from you.

Upon the publication of the sonata, Aleksandrov decided to remove the inscription because he felt that the content of the sonata was broader in conception than that depicted in the poem.<sup>255</sup>

<sup>253</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 122.

<sup>254</sup> Emily Ezust, “The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Texts Archive,” <http://lieder.net/>, accessed June 23, 2013.

<sup>255</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 37.

This sonata differs from the first with more refined writing, clearly contrasting characters, and more intense development of the musical material. Kokushkin also notes that “the composer’s wonderful gift for thematic development, the skill to unite all musical elements under one artistic idea, and the mastery of polyphonic writing” are all more noticeable in this piece.<sup>256</sup>

The one-movement composition’s first theme, in D minor, is a yearning and agitated melody with its character intensified by the urgent chromatic off-beat chords in the left hand’s accompaniment (Ex. 5.3).

Example 5.3. Sonata No. 2, First theme, mm. 1-4



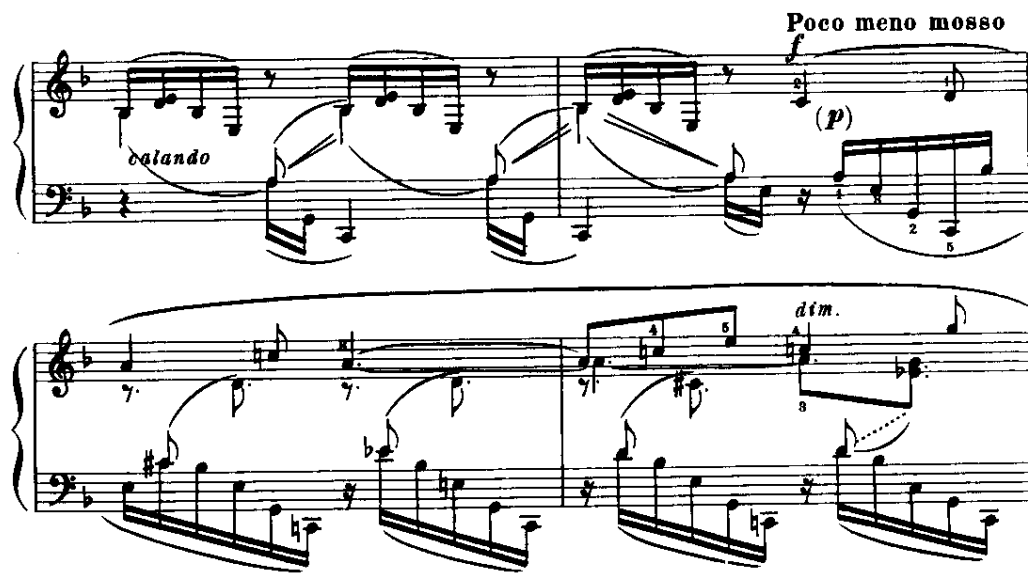
In analyzing the stylistic aspects of the first theme, Alekseev remarks that its origin comes from “Medtner’s circle;” however, Aleksandrov emotionally “re-intonates” the expressive intent of his beloved composer. As a result, the theme, in the lyric-narrative style of Medtner, becomes agitated and impulsive.<sup>257</sup>

<sup>256</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 112-13.

<sup>257</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 37.

The extended statement of this theme covers a range of emotions from quiet longing to passionate despair, after which enters the lyrical and serene first theme in F Major (Ex. 5.4). The unusual tonal relationships are found in the recapitulation, where the first theme's second half shifts a half-step lower, and the second theme is stated in B-flat major, with the original key, D minor, not reappearing until the closing theme.

Example 5.4. Sonata No. 2, Second theme, mm. 46-51



An active development and recapitulation are filled with dramatic contrasts and effective color changes. Somber and mysterious musical stretches are juxtaposed with transparent serenity and march-like episodes. The sonata concludes with a powerful coda with both themes sounding in D Major. The manuscript of the work contains another inscription at this point. Right before the coda Aleksandrov quotes a line from Vikenty Veresaev's translation of Archilochus's poem, which can be translated as: "The immortal gods have embedded powerful courage into our spirit." These inspiring words are also omitted in the published version.

The harmony in the sonata reflects Aleksandrov's search for expressive sonorities and colors by incorporating traditional and modern compositional techniques. While mainly in the major-minor sphere, it is enriched with abundant chromaticism. The alterations of both primary and secondary chord functions are often encountered in this piece. Especially frequent are the dominant seventh and ninth chords with lowered or raised fifths. Example 5.5 begins with the climax of the first section of the development. The augmented chord is sustained for one and a half measures. Then, with two common pitches, it turns into a French augmented sixth chord in F-sharp minor, resolving to the cadential tonic in the second inversion, followed by a dominant seventh chord with the lowered fifth, also functioning as the shift to parallel major. The *pesante allargando* measure features a dominant seventh chord in the first inversion with the raised fifth, coloring the passage once again with augmented harmony. After a brief tonic, another altered dominant, this time secondary (of iv) and with a lowered fifth, is left unresolved, only to be followed with an even more dissonant dominant ninth of the distant E Major. The *ff* dynamic level and voicing create an effect of a thick clustered chord. The tension is yet again unresolved and is followed by an energetic march-like episode accompanied by a chromatic ostinato octave pattern in the left hand, which serves as an impulse toward the next section of the development.

Such progressions of the unresolved seventh and ninth chords with their inversions create a "harmonic ellipsis," and are important in the harmonic language of early Aleksandrov, which is influenced by Scriabin. Also typical are such techniques as sequences in tritones and minor thirds, and half-step tonal shifts.

Example 5.5. Sonata No. 2, mm. 135-141



The piano texture in the Second Sonata, too, is very different from that of the First. Overall, this piece is much more virtuosic, and it employs many styles of the pianistic techniques traditionally used by Russian composers, including large arpeggio passages, various types of scalar figurations, fast double octaves, and massive chord sections. Primarily homophonic writing is enriched with various polyphonic counter melodies and supporting voices – a feature that is frequently observed in Aleksandrov’s piano writing style.

Aleksandrov considered this composition to be his first “real” sonata.<sup>258</sup> The piece indeed presents Aleksandrov as an individual artist with a distinct message. Victor Beliaev, one of the first critical reviewers of the work, writes in his article from the 1925 issue of the *Sovremennaya Muzyka* [Contemporary Music] periodical, “In this sonata Aleksandrov is more open and direct with his intentions and moods than in the first; he

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 37.



depicts the overcoming of a pessimistic mood expressed in the touching lament and the joyful manifestation in the end of the sonata.”<sup>259</sup> In his book about Aleksandrov’s work, he further notes that with this sonata the composer became definitely characterized as an artist that has a tendency toward lyricism.<sup>260</sup> Zhilyaev finds the sonata “serious and concentrated, with free and polished form and variety of themes.”<sup>261</sup> Miaskovsky views the composition as more dramatic and significant than the first.<sup>262</sup> Finally, Medtner, who upon Aleksandrov’s request agreed to be the dedicatee of the piece, received the sonata very positively.<sup>263</sup>

Despite the initial encouraging reviews, later critics appear to observe that in the Second Sonata Aleksandrov had not yet achieved a pronounced individual style, due to continuing influences of Medtner, Scriabin, and Rachmaninov. Alekseev, Kokushkin, and Sitsky all find strong Medtner influence in the characters of themes and the tonal relationship between them, as well as in the use of the “large-scale romantic gestures.”<sup>264</sup> Peter Grove, while also mentioning Medtner’s and Rachmaninov’s influences in the work, stresses that the sonata “follows the pattern of Skriabin’s later sonatas.”<sup>265</sup>

The “Scriabinistic” moments in the piece are reflected not only in the use of harmony, as described earlier, but also in the texture of several sections. The example that best illustrates this statement may be found in the sonata’s coda (Ex. 5.6). In this passage, the first theme is stated in high register fortissimo chords accompanied by the

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<sup>259</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 248.

<sup>260</sup> Beliaev, *Anatoli Nikolaevich Aleksandrov*, 10.

<sup>261</sup> Zhilyaev, "Anatoly Aleksandrov and His Third Piano Sonata," 34.

<sup>262</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 244.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>264</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 204.

<sup>265</sup> Peter Grove, Liner Notes, *Rarities of Piano Music at 'Schloss vor Husum,'* Yuri Martinov (piano), DANACORD DACOCD 489, 1998, compact disc.

intense motion of the sextuplet chord accompaniment in the left hand. Together with the rhythmic alteration of the theme, the musical atmosphere creates an ecstatic effect which strongly recalls Scriabin's style. Compare, for instance, mm. 268-272 of Aleksandrov's sonata and mm. 140-143 of Scriabin's Fourth Sonata (Ex. 5.7).

Example 5.6. Sonata No. 2, mm. 265-272



Example 5.7. A. Scriabin, Sonata No. 4, second movement, mm. 138-143

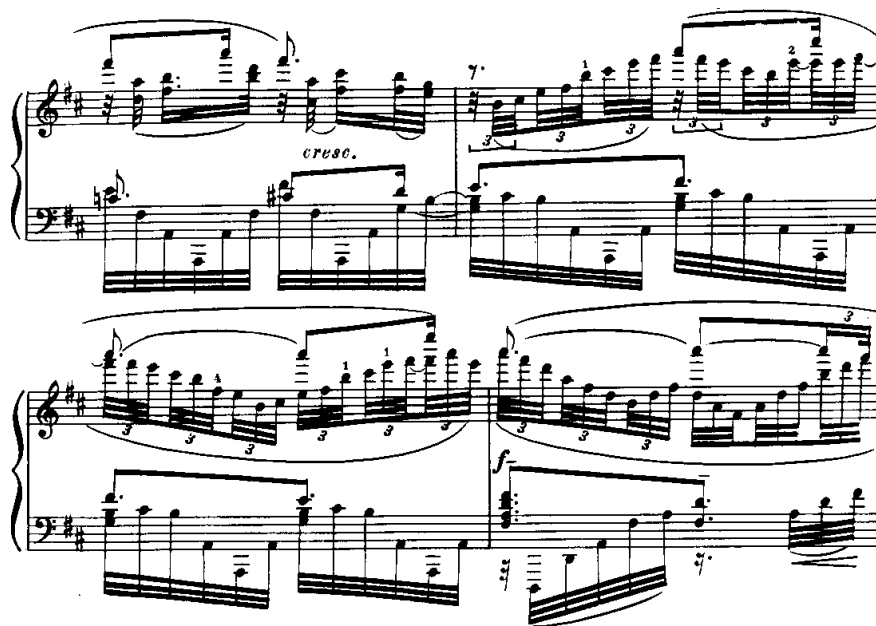


Sitsky, who argues that Aleksandrov is closer in style to Rachmaninov than to anyone else points out Rachmaninov's influence most specifically. He writes, "In spirit [Aleksandrov's] music is closer to Rachmaninov, from whom the device of descending chromatic patterns is adopted for use both melodically and decoratively. This leads

occasionally to tonal instability.”<sup>266</sup> He further notes, “The openly proclaimed melancholy of the piece also seems to owe something to Rachmaninov.”<sup>267</sup>

The influence of impressionism is also found in the coda of Aleksandrov’s Second Sonata. The passage in Example 5.8 illustrates how a combination of pentatonic mode, polyrhythm, and the interplay of registers creates a Debussy-like atmosphere.

**Example 5.8. Sonata No. 2, mm. 302-305**



It seems that only Alekseev acknowledges the emergence of Aleksandrov’s individual style in the sonata. While still mentioning the influence of Medtner and Rachmaninov, he distinguishes Aleksandrov’s characteristic free improvisational manner of expression.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 204.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 37-38.

Aleksandrov's Second Sonata was premiered by the composer at a solo concert organized by the Moscow composers' union under the music department of the People's Commissariat of Education (NARKOMPROS).<sup>269</sup> It became a popular piece among distinguished performers, such as Heinrich Neuhaus, Yakov Zak, and Aleksey Nasedkin. In addition, this piece, along with the Fourth Sonata, was frequently included in the programs of music conservatory students.<sup>270</sup> A recording of the sonata performed by Yakov Zak still exists in the form of an LP produced by the Melodiya label.

### Sonata No. 3, Opus 18 (1920), F-Sharp Minor

Anatoly Aleksandrov's Third Piano Sonata presents a different aspect of the composer's work. Its prevailing dark colors, somewhat rough and rigid gestures, and disquieting emotions are rarely countered with lyricism. Kokushkin points out that such nervous distress and intense dramatic feeling is atypical of Aleksandrov's style.<sup>271</sup> Without a doubt, these tendencies are in conflict with Aleksandrov's general philosophy about singing a "Hymn to Life" in his music. Nevertheless, they are sometimes encountered in his work, in such places as the Seventh Sonata and sections of other sonatas.

The sonata was begun before Aleksandrov went away to Melitopol for military service and completed as soon as the composer came back to Moscow. Although he did not take part in direct military action, he witnessed the horrors of war face to face. Thus, it is likely that the service time in the Red Army influenced the dark, uneasy, and nervous mood of the sonata. Aleksandrov, however, was not the only composer to react to the

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<sup>269</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 238.

<sup>270</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 39.

<sup>271</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 114.

political climate. One may observe a general tendency of the composers in 1920s to depict nervous tension in their music. Some examples include Miaskovsky's Third Sonata (1920) and Feinberg's Sixth (1925). Whether due to the consequences of war on one hand, or the ever increasing influence of Scriabin on the other, intensification of the musical language and rejection of singing lyricism in piano compositions was very noticeable.

This change of character demanded a different approach to the one-movement form, resulting in some structural modifications. For example, this is Aleksandrov's only sonata that begins with an introduction. This rather large opening, spanning forty measures, has a significant dramatic purpose throughout the sonata. The introduction consists of two parts (Ex. 5.9). The first part is comprised of two elements, of which the opening element, marked *Come se ricordando da qualche cosa* ["As if remembering something" – *ital.*], is lyrical and with its melodic shape similar to a Russian folk song. This sort of lyricism becomes typical of Aleksandrov, as is evident in later sonatas.

Example 5.9. Sonata No. 3, Introduction, mm. 1-7

**Tastando il tempo giusto; flessibile mosso**

The musical score for the introduction of Sonata No. 3, measures 1-7, is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 1-4, and the second system shows measures 5-7. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/8. The tempo/mood is indicated as "Tastando il tempo giusto; flessibile mosso". The score includes a piano (p) dynamic marking at the beginning. The first system is marked "Come se ricordando da qualche cosa" and "accentuato". The second system is marked "dim." and "rinforzando".

The second element, marked *accentuato*, is of grotesque character; its rhythmic and melodic curve is whimsical and angular, although it is also similar to the singing inflection. The intriguing tension created by these two elements reveals Aleksandrov's complex personality. This duality was noticed by Beliaev In 1927, who writes:

The introduction of the sonata (before the fugato) is a portrait of the composer's most intimate inner world. It includes the pensive tenderness of the beginning motive, immediately changing to a skeptical frown, and another more rigid motif, characterized by the sighing of the chromatic lines, very characteristic of Aleksandrov.<sup>272</sup>

The first part of the introduction reappears with slight changes before the development and before the recapitulation. In addition, there is a thematic and dramatic connection between material in the introduction and the main themes of the sonata. The introduction's built-in conflict of two elements affects the rest of the piece. For instance, the grotesque element is felt in the beginning of the first theme and the second part of the second theme. Lyric features permeate the romantically exalted ending of the first theme and the colorful beginning of the second theme. Finally, the closing theme is thematically connected with the second half of the introduction. All these circumstances point to the introduction's special role in its inclusion of leitmotives. This was a very original technique used by Aleksandrov to realize the dramatic concept of the piece.

After the second part of the introduction – more dramatic and rigid than the opening fifteen measures – the first theme of the sonata is finally stated. Interestingly, it is stated as a fugato. The use of this technique in theme statement is truly rare in the sonata genre, if not unique. As suggested by Kokushkin, it is successful here mainly because of the nature of the introduction. "In this case," Kokushkin writes, "[the fugato]

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<sup>272</sup> Beliaev, *Anatoli Nikolaevich Aleksandrov*, 11.

was possible because of the bifunctionality of the introduction that exposes the first theme.”<sup>273</sup>

Another interesting structural feature in the sonata is the considerably delayed start of the development, which is preceded by the reappearance of the introduction material and then by the section titled “Interludio.” This lyrical passage, sixty measures in length, could almost be perceived as the middle movement of a sonata. It is calm, diatonic, and rooted in the Russian song tradition. Beliaev views this section as “depicting the creator’s submerge to the world of far recollections.”<sup>274</sup> One cannot help but recognize the parallel with Prokofiev’s Third Piano Sonata (1907, revised 1917), where the action of the tempestuous first theme suddenly stops, and the lyrical Russian song-like second theme appears.

As in Prokofiev’s sonata, the serenity of “Interludio” is interrupted by an intense development section. Frequent tempo and key changes create an atmosphere of struggle and tension. After another reminiscence of the introduction, the recapitulation enters with a changed tonal plan. The first theme’s second half is now raised by a whole step, as is the second theme, stated here in E major. The sonata’s main key, F-sharp minor, is confirmed in the coda, which unites almost all of the thematic material. Kokushkin and Beliaev both describe the effect of this coda as a brave dramatic dance symbolizing a victory of the creative spirit.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 115.

<sup>274</sup> Beliaev, *Anatoli Nikolaevich Aleksandrov*, 11.

<sup>275</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma*, 249, and Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 116.

Aside from the sonata's structure, other musical devices contribute to the composition's complex image content. The harmony, in addition to the previously described altered dominant and ninth chords, is further intensified by the split-third and split-fifth chords, as well as polyfunctional sonorities. These serve to weaken the tonality. Frequent instances of the octatonic and the Lydian-Mixolydian scales, along with chromatic and whole-tone scales, also add to the harmonic dissonance.

Peter Deane Roberts in his study of the techniques used by Russian modernist composers in their piano music often refers to Aleksandrov's Third Sonata in order to illustrate such methods as the linear style, ostinato principle, and tonal structures. He observes, for instance, that Aleksandrov achieved certain sonority by combining ostinato principle and linear writing with particular scales systems. In Roberts' words, "Sonata No. 3 has some extended passages in flowing linear style, in which the coloring depends on varying scale patterns over extended pedal points, often related to dominant ninth formations."<sup>276</sup> The passage in Example 5.10 illustrates Roberts' statement. In this section, while the right hand melody forms a line based on the introduction material, the left hand's repeated arpeggiated figuration, made up of the Lydian-Mixolydian scale, creates what Roberts calls a "harmonic ostinato,"<sup>277</sup> allowing the color of the scale to affect the melodic lines.

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<sup>276</sup> Peter Deane Roberts, *Modernism in Russian Piano Music: Scriabin, Prokofiev, and Their Russian Contemporaries*, 2 vols., Russian Music Studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 76.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



Example 5.10. Sonata No. 3, mm. 230-237

The image displays a musical score for a piano sonata, specifically measures 230 through 237. The score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. The first system begins with the tempo marking "Poco stentato, tastando II" and includes performance instructions such as "poco rit.", "dim.", and "p". The second system is marked "tempo giusto". The third system is marked "Tempo giusto, drammatico" and includes "p" and "cresc." markings. The fourth system also includes "cresc." markings. The notation includes complex chords, arpeggios, and melodic lines in both the right and left hands.

One of the first reviewers of the sonata, Zhilyaev, praises Aleksandrov's immense talent and mastery of his art. He considers this sonata superior to the previous one because it is more independent and original in its broad concept and particularly creative introduction and other thematic material.<sup>278</sup>

While recognizing Aleksandrov's individuality, Zhilyaev also points out the increased influence of Medtner and Scriabin, particularly the "Scriabin-like restless closing theme," and distinguishes the new influence of Debussy, which in his view was

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<sup>278</sup> Zhilyaev, "Anatoly Aleksandrov and His Third Piano Sonata," 33-34.

absent in Aleksandrov's earlier sonatas.<sup>279</sup> Finally, discussing the pianistic difficulty of the sonata, he concludes that the piece is challenging, although not as demanding as the sonatas of Medtner or Scriabin."<sup>280</sup>

The sonata also moved Beliaev, as he writes that the sonata as a whole is "like a reflection of one's life journey."<sup>281</sup> He especially gratifies that in his Third Sonata, Aleksandrov "unites the personal and the national; he chooses an obviously Russian characteristic theme as the basis for the composition and broadens the spectrum of his feelings further than in his previous sonata."<sup>282</sup>

Larry Sitsky finds that in this composition Aleksandrov chose to work with "slimmer, more neoclassical materials," as seen in shorter phrases and the opening fugato.<sup>283</sup> Sitsky also points out the "rich writing for the piano" and similarity to Rachmaninov's style, particularly in the *Interludio*.<sup>284</sup> The latter point is supported by Christoph Flamm, the author of an extensive article about Aleksandrov in the encyclopedia *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.<sup>285</sup> He comments that the "Interlude" is "strongly reminiscent of Rachmaninov."<sup>286</sup>

The critical observations described above lead to a simple conclusion: The uniqueness of the composer's Third Piano Sonata lies in his ability to combine strong contemporary influences, Russian nationalism, modernism techniques, and individuality

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>281</sup> Beliaev, *Anatoli Nikolaevich Aleksandrov*, 11.

<sup>282</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma*, 248-49.

<sup>283</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 204.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Friedrich Blume, ed. *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed. (Kassel, New York: Bärenreiter, 1999), s.v. "Aleksandrov, Anatolii," by Christoph Flamm.

<sup>286</sup> Christoph Flamm, Liner Notes, *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hamish Milne (piano), Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc.

to fit in a sonata format. Dedicated to Aleksandrov's school friend V. F. Bulgakov, the sonata was frequently included in concert programs, and was notably performed by Samuil Feinberg and Maria Yudina.

#### Sonata No. 4, Opus 19 (1922), C Major

Begun in December of 1921 and finished in May of 1922, Aleksandrov's Fourth Piano Sonata initiated a new stage in the composer's development. Leaving behind the one-movement structure, the composer shifted to a three-movement format. The new setting made way for a more grandiose dramatic concept, which evidently suited Aleksandrov, since all of his subsequent sonatas have similar multi-movement organization, generally in three movements. In its emotional context the Fourth Sonata is similar to the Second. It is an uplifting ode to life's goodness. Some critics once again suggest that this mood was inspired by the revolutionary atmosphere of the time.<sup>287</sup> Considering Aleksandrov's greater concern for music rather than politics, however, it is more likely that the sonata's optimistic impression was the result of the composer's own philosophical ideas about art.

As in the Second Sonata, the dramatic concept of the Fourth is revealed in the manuscript, in which each movement has a programmatic title. The first movement is titled "The Exultant Tragedy," although, as recalls pianist Vladimir Bunin from conversations with Aleksandrov, the initial title was thought to be "The Outburst."<sup>288</sup> In another conversation with Kokushkin the composer mentions a different version of the

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<sup>287</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 122.

<sup>288</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 181.

first movement's title, "The Challenge."<sup>289</sup> The second movement, "Reflection" or "Meditation," and the third movement, "Fire," did not have alternative titles. As in the Second Sonata, these titles were removed in the published version.

Aleksandrov's search for the right words to express the emotions of the first movement is understandable, since it is the most crucial movement of the work. The composer himself acknowledges its significance by explaining, "The Fourth Sonata is the only composition where everything is defeated by the first theme of the first movement, which embodies the unbeatable outburst of life."<sup>290</sup>

The first movement's "outburst" makes itself present from the very beginning in the one-and-a-half-measure introductory phrase; the right hand's ascending chord fanfare and the momentum of the sweeping octave passage in the left hand successfully seize the listener's attention. Immediately following this, the first theme is stated. Its stirring melody is restless and emotionally charged. The triplets of the supporting parts continue the impulse created by the introductory phrase (Ex. 5.11).

The juxtaposition of the diatonic melody and chromatic accompaniment create an impression of a hero victoriously fighting against threatening forces. In addition, it is noteworthy to mention that the first theme's first phrase echoes the first section of Tatyana's Letter Scene from Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. Perhaps, in its rhythmic and melodic resemblance, as well as determined and passionate character, Aleksandrov unconsciously pays tribute to his first musical hero.

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<sup>289</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 117.

<sup>290</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 118.

Example 5.11. Sonata No. 4, first movement, mm. 1-5



The section after the first theme's conclusion at measure 25 is initially perceived as a transitional theme (Ex. 5.12). Yet, considering the sudden change of texture and character, clearly marked *severamente*, and the dramatic significance of this musical material in the development and recapitulation, it would be more accurate to describe this as the beginning of the second theme. Aleksandrov depicted this place in the movement as an obstacle, like "running into a wall."<sup>291</sup>

Further observation of the small sections that follow reveals that the second theme consists of several different images. One is the above-mentioned passage *severamente*, marked by a gloomy march-like episode colored with mysterious harmonic progressions. The next is a playfully capricious nine-measure fragment, unexpectedly interrupted by a passage in a grotesque and sarcastic character (Ex. 5.13 and 5.14). The latter is contrasted with an additional conflicting image depicting a quiet yet tense atmosphere.

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<sup>291</sup> Blok, A. N. *Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 181.

Example 5.12. Sonata No. 4, mm. 25-28

Example 5.13. Sonata No. 4, mm. 37-39

Example 5.14. Sonata No. 4, mm. 46-47

Observation of the moods that characterize the second theme reveals the strong influence of Prokofiev. The grotesque images, sharply defined rhythm, and the ostinato

accompaniment all recall Prokofiev's style. While the resemblance is already evident in the examples above, it is most clearly shown in the development. Example 5.15 illustrates an episode from the development section.

**Example 5.15. Sonata No. 4, mm. 100-105**



The presentation of these contrasting moods depicts an intriguing fantastical world. This is an effective strategy for creating a conflict. The second theme group ends with another statement of the introductory phrase leading into the closing theme, which brings back the romantically passionate mood of the first theme.

Summarizing the observations above, it can be concluded that with its multitude of themes, the exposition displays two main forces: the positive passionately uplifting group, which is represented by the introductory phrase, the first, and the closing themes, and the negative grotesque group that is defined by the four colorful aspects of the second theme.

The conflict of the two forces is obvious in the dynamic development, which includes most of the material from the exposition. The conflicting fragments create a picture of a battle between good and evil. The heated atmosphere reaches its climax at

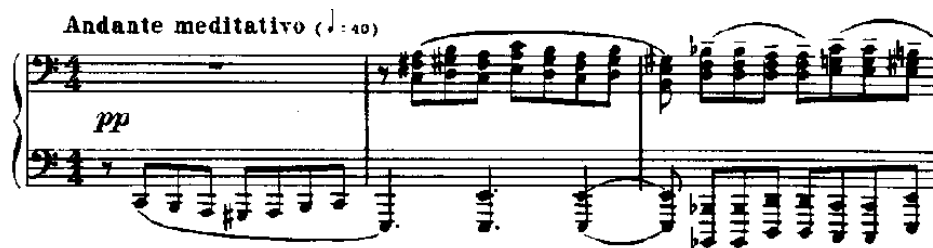
measure 116, where the blazing first theme overwhelms the negative forces depicted by the persistent accompaniment from the second theme.

The positive outcome is also evident in the recapitulation, where Aleksandrov omits the most grotesque aspect of the second theme (Ex. 5.14). Moreover, it is reinforced with a powerful and triumphant coda, in which once again dominates the first theme, supported by the stable C pedal tone in the bass.

Aleksandrov considered the first movement as an independent piece, perhaps due to the completeness of the dramatic and musical ideas in it. In separate performance of it, however, he suggests slight changes in the dynamics of the coda: Instead of *diminuendo* and *pianissimo*, it should be played *ff* with continuous growth to the end.<sup>292</sup>

The second movement, *Andante meditativo*, is a profound reflection. Aleksandrov explains that this movement is a serious contemplation, asking, “Is this so?”<sup>293</sup> The philosophical mood of the music is expressed in the opening’s pensive steady movement of the eighth note chords, darkened by the low register and tonal ambiguity (Ex. 5.16).

Example 5.16. Sonata No. 4, second movement, mm. 1-3



The calm rhythmic flow continues in the accompaniment to the next theme, a lyrical, warm, and somewhat melancholic song. Enriched with the countermelody in the

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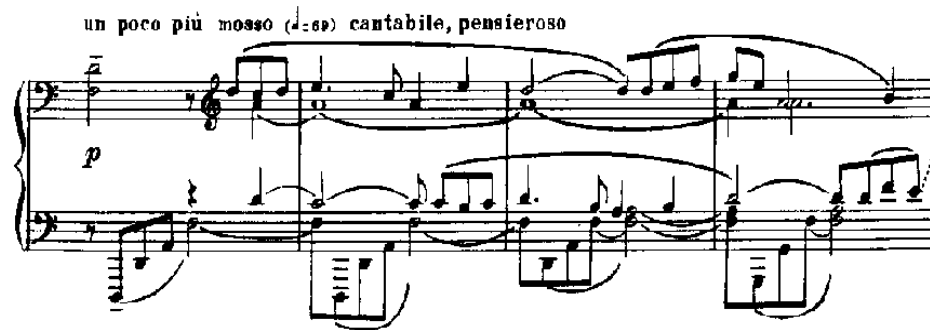
<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 118.



tenor register, this is one of the most expressive, sincere, and heart-felt themes in Aleksandrov's output (Ex. 5.17).

**Example 5.17. Sonata No. 4, second movement, mm. 10-13**



The middle section begins with a slow and winding fugato, based on the first two themes of the movement. The meditative mood, however, is suddenly interrupted by a bold energetic march. Kokushkin points out the march's similarity to a mass revolutionary song and notes that this was Aleksandrov's first utilization of such material – a trait encountered more frequently in the composer's future sonatas.<sup>294</sup> This short episode is followed by a recapitulation, which recalls the material of the first section. The echoes of the march-like episode are heard in the coda, and shortly after it the movement quietly comes to an end.

Aside from the emotionally captivating musical content, the second movement presents an interesting treatment of the form. At first glance, the three sections described above constitute a ternary structure. However, because the first section has the traits of the exposition – two distinctive themes that return in the recapitulation – and the fugato in beginning of the middle part, along with the inserted contrasting episode, are the

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<sup>294</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 119-20.

characteristic features of the development section, the structure can be also viewed as a sonata form. Tonal analysis supports such treatment of the form. Kokushkin, who initially observed this phenomenon, refers to such structure as the synthetic form.<sup>295</sup> It is fascinating that in the eighty-one-measure movement Aleksandrov was able to create a unique architecture – a compound ternary form on one hand and sonata form on the other – and fill it with a meaningful content.

The third movement is best described in Aleksandrov's own words. He says:

[It] starts with a dramatic theme that depicts troublesome life, which makes the first movement's victory incomplete. The second theme is whimpering, and in the recapitulation it is weeping heavily. In the middle, the reflection becomes more and more intense. The ending of this movement is tragic, and the reminiscence of the first theme from the first movement begins as the apotheosis, the confirmation of the victory that happened in the first movement.<sup>296</sup>

The return of the sonata's initial theme is important for two reasons. One is that it confirms the composition's dramatic idea – the triumph of the positive forces – and the other is that it creates a structural “arch” that unifies the whole work. This polished design is typical of Aleksandrov.

The piano writing in the Fourth Sonata is more dense and compact than in the previous sonatas. The scalar passages and wide arpeggio figurations are replaced with octave and chord passages. While polyphonic texture remains a priority, the supporting countermelodies and the large leaps to the low bass notes also add to the pianistic fabric of the piece. However, the piano style of the sonata is often perceived as virtuosic.

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>296</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 118.

To summarize, Aleksandrov's Fourth Sonata is not only the composer's first multi-movement work in this genre, but with its broad dramatic idea it presents more creative characters and masterful treatment of the structure.

The sonata received high praise from Aleksandrov's composer-colleagues Nikolai Miaskovsky and Alexander Krein. The latter considers the piece to be among the best Russian sonatas and notes its brilliance and expert writing for the piano.<sup>297</sup> Alekseev, too, describes the sonata as one of Aleksandrov's most creative works and especially notes the second movement.<sup>298</sup> The more modern researcher Flamm also marks the sonata's grandeur and structural benefits by stating, "This sonata does not just give the impression of being a unified whole: its stability and confidence engender happiness, and it attains an undisguised grandiosity through the cyclical return of the themes in the stormy finale."<sup>299</sup>

The sonata first became popular with audiences at the Wednesday gatherings in the house of musicologist Pavel Lamm.<sup>300</sup> It was subsequently performed by numerous pianists. Feinberg frequently played the work.<sup>301</sup> Neuhaus, as reported by Flamm, "liked performing this work and, according to contemporary reviews, performed with even more vitality than the composer had in mind."<sup>302</sup> Shostakovitch, too, enjoyed playing this sonata, as recalled by Aleksandrov.<sup>303</sup> Finally, Aleksandrov himself was known to perform the composition in the new 1954 edition, as evident from his letters to Natalia

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<sup>297</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 122.

<sup>298</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 35, 38.

<sup>299</sup> Christoph Flamm, Liner Notes, *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hamish Milne (piano), Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 39.

<sup>302</sup> Christoph Flamm, Liner Notes, *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hamish Milne (piano), Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc.

<sup>303</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 37.

Polenova.<sup>304</sup> The sonata is dedicated to Maria Vassilievna Moritz, who lived in France beginning in 1924. She was the daughter of V. D. Polenov and the aunt of Aleksandrov's daughter Elena Polenova.

Sonata No. 5, Opus 22 (1923), G-Sharp Minor

Aleksandrov's Fifth Piano Sonata reveals a different artistic side of the composer. While it begins with a dreamy songlike melody with clear phrases and diatonic harmony typical of Aleksandrov (Ex. 5.18), it soon becomes clear that simplicity and lyricism do not prevail in this work. Dense chromaticism infuses most of the material; combinations of complex rhythmic figures overwhelm the fluency of the beat; dense figurations and chordal structures thicken the texture; frequent and sudden mood changes add to the impulsive and nervous atmosphere. This results in the general dark and tense character of the sonata. It seems that all elements in the work contribute toward highly sophisticated composition.

Example 5.18. Sonata No. 5, mm. 1-4



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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 99.

It is remarkable that this composition was created during Aleksandrov's stay in a beloved place: the home of a dear family friend and renowned artist Vasily Polenov. Aleksandrov recalls that it was very pleasant to work there in such an inspiring atmosphere.<sup>305</sup> A decade later, Sergei Prokofiev would write his *Romeo and Juliet* in the same house.

Complex musical language in the Fifth Sonata is related to the influences of colleagues. Aleksandrov acknowledges later in his life that this sonata was a “strong swing to a different side” and explains that it was composed during a time when he was surrounded by people who favored a tendency toward sophistication.<sup>306</sup> He thought that his writing was not intricate enough; thus, in order to prove his mastery, he deliberately included more dissonance in his work, using seconds, parallel chords, and other elements.<sup>307</sup>

Aleksandrov's tendency is understandable, considering the historic and artistic situation of the time. As described earlier, this was the “Transition Stage” in Soviet history and a period of increased activity of the Association of Contemporary Music, in which Aleksandrov served as a dedicated member. Widely practiced musical experiments in modernism are most evident in the Fifth Sonata.

The sonata consists of two movements. It is possible to identify sonata form, although it is freely treated, in the first movement. The second movement is a theme with ten variations. Aleksandrov's inclination toward a freer metric construction is evident in the absence of a time signature in the theme and most of the variations. Tonally and

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<sup>305</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 83.

<sup>306</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 119.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

melodically, the theme is characteristic of Aleksandrov (Ex. 5.19); it is mainly diatonic with its motives rooted in the Russian song tradition. In addition, Sitsky mentions the composer's characteristic "tonal drift and return," most likely referring to a subtle shift from A-flat Major to E Major and back to A-flat Major.<sup>308</sup>

**Example 5.19. Sonata No. 5, second movement, mm. 1-7**



The variations employ various textures and tempos, all permeated with complex rhythms and dissonant sonorities. Variation 9 is a Fugue with pervasive chromaticism. In the middle of its development, the motives of the first movement's themes return and reach an impressive climax dominated by the material of the second theme. The ensuing Variation 10 is a short Coda, which brings the composition to a quiet end.

The abundance of complexity in the Fifth Sonata results in great difficulty for both the listener and the performer. Complexity dominates over mood and emotional appeal, making communication with audience difficult. Kokushkin observes this disadvantage and criticizes Aleksandrov's preoccupation with deliberately complicating the musical language, as he writes, "The development of musical material is intentionally meticulous and displays stylistic kaleidoscope. Despite the composer's creativity, the

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<sup>308</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 205.

sonata does not impress: unity of composition, intensity of the dramatic conflict, freshness, and emotional integrity were all surpassed by the previous sonatas.”<sup>309</sup>

On the other hand, in the review dated 1924, most likely following the first performance, composer Alexander Shenshin distinguishes the variations as especially successful due to the Aleksandrov’s ability to achieve unity in this form.<sup>310</sup> He also points out that “The sonata’s general character and the manner of development are closer to the Third Sonata, with its somewhat improvisatory qualities, rather than to the stricter Fourth.”<sup>311</sup> Shenshin’s contemporary Beliaev supports this view in his book.<sup>312</sup> He received the work positively and considered this sonata to be one of the most delicate of Aleksandrov’s first six sonatas. He writes that all the composer’s creative ideas were reflected in the musical material in a more concentrated, polished, and laconic way.<sup>313</sup> This view, however endorsed by Beliaev, yields to Kokushkin’s, considering the limited popularity of the sonata. Aside from its composer and Feinberg, the dedicatee of the piece, the composition is not known to have been performed in public.

Aleksandrov, too, was dissatisfied with several sections of the sonata. While he thought that some of the thematic material, such as the first and second themes, and the theme of the variations was worthy, he felt that the relationship between the two leading themes of the first movement was not well-coordinated.<sup>314</sup> In addition, he was not pleased with the statement of selected material, specifically, that of the second and closing

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<sup>309</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 123.

<sup>310</sup> Alexander Shenshin, “The Compositions of Anatoly Aleksandrov,” *Musical Culture*, no. 1 (1924): 64.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Beliaev, *Anatoli Nikolaevich Aleksandrov*, 12.

<sup>313</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 249.

<sup>314</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 119.

themes.<sup>315</sup> He also was critical of his somewhat forced decorative techniques and intentional meticulousness in the variations, especially in the fugue (Variation 9), where, as he stated, he composed a “clever canon at the fifth.”<sup>316</sup> Aleksandrov revised the sonata in 1938, perhaps in an attempt to correct these imperfections. When comparing the two editions of the sonata, Sitsky finds that Aleksandrov removed certain especially dissonant passages and points out that the revised version “certainly reflects the changing climate in Soviet music.”<sup>317</sup> It is not clear whether the revision of the sonata was ultimately the result of artistic or political considerations. It is likely, however, that the environment of Social Realism during the 1930s led Aleksandrov to adjust his creative standards.

#### Sonata No. 6, Opus 26 (1925), G Major

Written less than two years after its predecessor, Aleksandrov’s Sixth Piano Sonata presents a vivid contrast to the previous work. Its first movement abounds with transparency of texture and pianistic writing, as well as a graceful character. This relative simplicity is apparent even in the more involved third movement. The compact structure, the tendency to lighten the texture, the economy of the musical material, and the clearly defined themes are all evidence of Aleksandrov continuing his search for a personal style and new means of expression.

The overall lighthearted and elegant first movement is built according to clear-cut sonata allegro form principles, with equal and balanced exposition, development, and recapitulation. The first theme is simple and pastoral in character, and quite “catchy,”

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 205.



according to Alekseev, who ensures that if it is heard once, it will be retained in the memory for a long time (Ex. 5.20).<sup>318</sup>

**Example 5.20. Sonata No. 6, First movement, mm. 1-3**



The considerably thinner and more accommodating pianistic texture, noticeable throughout the piece, reminds one of the classical style. Sitsky even states that the sonata is “closer to a sonatina in style and texture.”<sup>319</sup> Such a departure from the earlier denser settings in the previous sonatas marked a significant change in Aleksandrov’s style. The majority of the subsequent sonatas also show this tendency toward simplification of the pianistic writing.

Following the first theme are the contemplative second and playful closing themes. The development foreshadows the finale through the marked statement of its main motive in the bass (mm. 62-64). This is the first of several significant appearances of the finale’s motive. Following its two additional appearances in the recapitulation of the first movement (mm. 100-101 and 107-109), the motive is also heard in the second movement (mm. 25-26, 39-40, and 50-51).

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<sup>318</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 36.

<sup>319</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 207.

The second movement, *Adagio ma non troppo*, is a fable-like narrative in E-flat minor. The outer sections of a simple ternary form present the expressive declamatory melody. Simple and diatonic, it is typical of Aleksandrov's themes (Ex. 5.21). The narrative quality is emphasized by the calm ostinato accompaniment and is reminiscent of the slow movements from Prokofiev's piano sonatas.

The middle section becomes more intense, largely due to the sophisticated chromatic countermelodies added to the diatonic theme (a characteristic of Prokofiev), and reaches a powerful climax before the return of the first section. The movement ends quietly, shortly after an anticipation of the finale's motive.

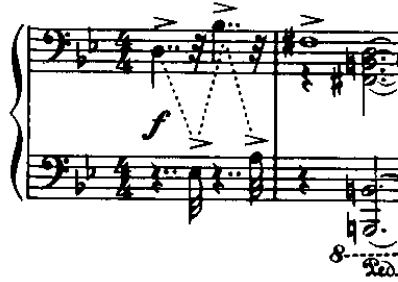
**Example 5.21. Sonata No. 6, Second movement, mm. 1-6**



The third movement differs stylistically from the other two. Its melodic content is based on a short impulsive motive rather than song-like intonations. The fanfare-like statement of the motive in the beginning of the movement, *Intrada, alla improvisata*, sets the intense mood (Ex. 5.22). As mentioned above, this motive was heard in several appearances earlier in the piece: three times in the first movement and three times in the

second. If these symbolic triple statements are not sufficient to prove the motive's significance, its importance is abundantly clear in the third movement, where virtually all themes are affected by it.

Example 5.22. Sonata No. 6, Third movement, mm. 1-2



The first theme defines the style and mood of the movement. Its march-like melody is capricious and impulsive in character, which is intensified by the left hand's aggressive chromatic accompaniment (Ex. 5.23). Kokushkin describes this theme as “eccentric,”<sup>320</sup> and Alekseev refers to it as simply “mean.”<sup>321</sup>

Example 5.23. Sonata No. 6, Third movement, mm. 6-7



The rest of the movement unfolds by means of juxtaposing various characters. Kokushkin distinguishes two groups of images here, the grotesque group – the

<sup>320</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 125.

<sup>321</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 39.

extravagant march, foxtrot, and a Russian dance – and the group surrounding simple march themes in the spirit of a song of the masses.<sup>322</sup> At the same time, this collage of moods is not perceived as scattered. On the contrary, unified by the thematic connections rooted in the *Intrada*'s leitmotif and its relationship to the other movements, the sonata presents a convincing whole.

In addition to the thematic unity of the sonata, the role of the ostinato is important in this piece. Numerous passages of the sonata contain ostinato accompaniment: the first movement's off-beat descending fifth figure in the first theme, multi-layered ostinato in the second theme, the above-mentioned second movement, and several instances in the middle section and the coda of the finale. The ostinato technique creates an impression of steady and persistent inevitable force. Aleksandrov uses it especially effectively in the second movement, where the ostinato accompaniment of the first theme comes to the forefront in the climax and becomes its leading component (mm. 32-38). He also uses ostinato to create color, as seen in the accompaniment to the first movement's second theme, where the wide arpeggios in the bass emphasize the tonic harmony, while the chords in the top register define the dominant harmony (Ex. 5.24). Together they surround the melody in the middle register. As described by Kokushkin, "Their multiple repetitions create the ostinato effect that smoothes the intensity while coloring the lyric melody in fairy-like fantastical tones."<sup>323</sup> He also points out the similarity of such

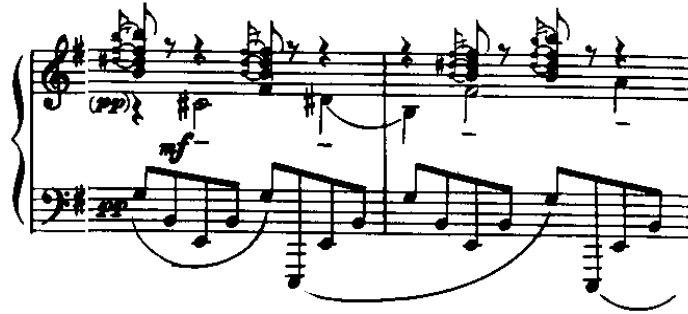
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<sup>322</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 123.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

coloristic work in both of his sonata-fairy-tales (No. 1 and No. 13), as well as in the Eleventh Sonata.<sup>324</sup>

**Example 5.24. Sonata No. 6, First movement, mm. 16-17**



Since ostinato was a common technique among the Russian modernist composers, Roberts observes the following, “In the context of Russian music of the Modernist period an ostinato can obscure the tonic, create friction, and generate new harmonies; it can have a cadential function, provide local color, or be used as the basis of structure of an entire piece; it can also serve a pictorial purpose.”<sup>325</sup> Roberts continues by listing Aleksandrov’s Sixth Sonata as an example of how ostinato controls the “overall plan of a work”: “Each main section [has] its own ostinato which recurs when the part is repeated.”<sup>326</sup>

The Sixth Sonata’s unusual transparency and clarity was noticed by many critics, including Beliaev, who writes that it was “almost in the character of Mozart.”<sup>327</sup> Sitsky, too, mentions that the sonata is “closer in ethos to the neoclassic ideal.”<sup>328</sup> Other influences are also perceived. Sitsky hears a French influence in the treatment of

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Roberts, *Modernism in Russian Piano Music: Scriabin, Prokofiev, and Their Russian Contemporaries*, 37.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>327</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma*, 249.

<sup>328</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 208.

harmony in the sonata and suggests that this was perhaps “the result of hearing Milhaud performing his own music and that of other contemporary French composers.”<sup>329</sup>

Regarding the third movement, Sitsky says that it “uses thematic material that could have come from Shostakovich.”<sup>330</sup> Kokushkin also points out the influence of young Shostakovich, along with Prokofiev and Stravinsky.<sup>331</sup>

Interestingly, Shostakovich was present at the premiere of the work. His reaction to the sonata, according to Aleksandrov’s recollections, is expressed in the words, “I like everything except for the finale.” In retrospect, Aleksandrov thought that Shostakovich said this because specifically in the finale there is “something of his grotesque music, though not very convincing.”<sup>332</sup> In this ironic way Aleksandrov admits the influence of his younger colleague.

#### Sonata No. 7, Opus 42 (1932), D Major

##### *The Sonatina*

Seven years had passed since the composition of the Sixth Sonata, but despite several attempts, Aleksandrov encountered difficulty creating a new sonata. The reasons for this difficulty are unclear. It is known, however, that Aleksandrov wanted to express something new in the sonata and was constantly searching for it. In a conversation with Alekseev he related that he finally found an unexpected breakthrough after attending an

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 207-208.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 124.

<sup>332</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 39.

event in the home of a friend, music critic Vladimir Derzhanovsky.<sup>333</sup> One of the guests at the event was Prokofiev, who had just returned from abroad and presented his recently composed sonatinas.<sup>334</sup> Although Aleksandrov thought that the pieces were a bit dry, he did like the logic of their development, the laconic form, and the instrumental writing style. Upon returning home, Aleksandrov, too, decided to construct a sonatina and immediately improvised the first theme of his new sonata, somewhat similar to the music he had heard from Prokofiev. The work progressed rapidly and resulted in what became Aleksandrov's favorite sonata.<sup>335</sup>

The Seventh Sonata's subtitle, *Sonatina*, reflects both the original inspiration behind the work and the compact structure. Although the composition's twenty-page length and the highly involved third movement are more appropriate for a full-sized sonata, there are evident traits of a sonatina construction, especially in the first two movements.

The first movement, *Allegretto flessibile*, is similar to the Sixth Sonata in its use of sonata form, where the three rather short but well-balanced and clearly defined sections skillfully develop the musical material consisting of two primary themes. The first theme is "idyllic and carefree," to use Aleksandrov's own words (Ex. 5.25).<sup>336</sup> Kokushkin points out that this theme, since it was initially improvised by the composer, is the only example of a spontaneous theme in Aleksandrov's work.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 156.

<sup>334</sup> Two sonatinas Op. 54 composed in 1931-1932.

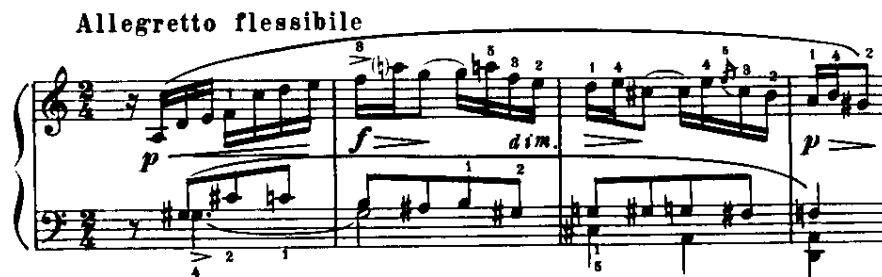
<sup>335</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 141.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>337</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 126.

The second theme is based on the imitation of a simple dance-like motive. Of the two themes, the first one dominates. As noticed by Alekseev and Kokushkin, its melodic content turned out to be related to the popular song “March of the Red Front Fighters” that he wrote in 1931. While Kokushkin believes that this relationship was unintentional,<sup>338</sup> Alekseev states that Aleksandrov was well aware of the connection.<sup>339</sup> This assertion is proved in the section before the recapitulation, where the first theme is heard in augmentation and dotted rhythm, making the connection to the earlier composed song especially noticeable. Alternatively, Aleksandrov’s spontaneous creation of the first theme could not have meant that he consciously built these motives into the music. Most likely, the composer discovered the similarity later in the work’s process. Nonetheless, the motives of the song greatly influenced the melodic language of the sonata’s first movement and are also developed in the finale, thus becoming an important link between the movements.

Example 5.25. Sonata No. 7, First movement, mm. 1-4



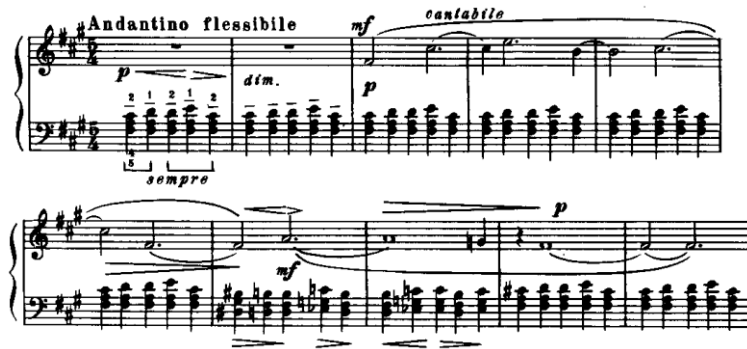
<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>339</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 157.



The second movement, *Canzona*, is a tender and reflective song in 5/4. A lyrical diatonic melody floats over the rocking accompaniment, creating at the same time a counterpoint with its upper voice (Ex. 5.26).

Example 5.26. Sonata No. 7, Second movement, mm. 1-10



The simple ternary form includes an unusual tonal progression. The first section modulates from F-sharp minor to F minor, and the middle section passes in two tonalities, A-flat Major and E Major. The recapitulation appears in an unobtrusive way, from the third phrase of the theme, as if only continuing the development. It is also shortened to one F-sharp minor statement, which creates a more compact form, appropriate for a sonatina setting.

The third movement, *Rondo*, in a sonata-rondo form, presents a vibrant and contrasting finale. As stated earlier, it restates the material from the first theme of the initial movement (Ex. 5.27). Transformed into a major mode with Lydian coloring, the opening theme of the finale sounds uplifting and energetic.

Example 5.27. Sonata No. 7, Third movement, mm. 1-2



The first episode (m. 17), functioning also as the second theme, is more active and dramatic with its persistent repeated tones and dotted rhythm. At measure 31 it becomes the basis for a vigorous fugato, which, according to Alekseev, “symbolizes the activation of dark enemy forces.”<sup>340</sup>

The central episode is tragic and mournful, in the character of a stately and somber monologue over a soldier’s grave (Ex. 5.28). The composer describes a clear image that he envisioned when composing this episode: “In my consciousness I suddenly had a vivid image of an orator delivering a speech during a funeral at a cemetery. The orator finished, and deep silence ensued.”<sup>341</sup> The monologue’s dark character is marked by the descending Mixolydian phrases accompanied by low base notes.

**Example 5.28. Sonata No. 7, Third movement, mm. 65-70**



Alekseev points out the synthesis of old traditions with the contemporary techniques in the statement of this episode. He remarks that on one hand, the scene echoes the sorrowful themes of the romanticism, and on the other hand, the dissonant intervals created by the imitative entrances of the voices and the peculiar statement of the lonely melody with distant bass notes point to the twentieth century style.<sup>342</sup>

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 157-58.

The finale's coda is based on the combination of themes from the first and central episodes. Its character illustrates Aleksandrov's characteristic "Hymn to Life" idea, previously expressed in the Second and Fourth Sonatas.

Aleksandrov's correspondence reveals that he composed two versions of the sonata's ending, most likely due to the criticism of Miaskovsky, who upon the first hearing of the sonata liked everything except for the end.<sup>343</sup> From the same letter, it is evident that the composer Victor Oransky, Aleksandrov's colleague, liked the sonata, even after the initial objection to the first theme's "salon" character. Zhilyaev, on the other hand, while not having heard the piece, had an impression that the sonata was written with a pedagogical purpose. Aleksandrov felt that this indicated Zhilyaev's disapproval of the work.<sup>344</sup>

The Seventh Piano Sonata presents many features that have been observed in the Sixth, such as clarity and simplicity of the musical statements, strict economy of musical tools, and enrichment with polyphony. These techniques are characteristic of the neoclassical school which widely flourished in the twentieth century. At the same time, Aleksandrov's characteristic romantic intensity is evident in such passages as the climax of the second movement and the central episode of the finale. Moreover, the *flessibile* indication in the first two movements allows room for pliability and spontaneity within the limits of strict construction. In addition, the modern dissonant harmonies, unexpected modulations in the ends of sections, and frequent changes of tonal centers show that Aleksandrov skillfully combined elements of the new musical language. As a result, the

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<sup>343</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 87.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

composition exemplifies the successful and clever synthesis of various styles within the framework of a polished sonatina-like structure.

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As observed in the discussion above, Aleksandrov's sonatas in the 1920s through the early 1930s present a variety of images, styles, and forms within the genre. Because of this, Aleksandrov's works from this period are more vibrant than the others and enjoyed the most popularity among contemporary performers. Their value is also stressed by Sitsky, who writes, "[Aleksandrov's] works from the 1920s and early 1930s are perhaps the most interesting, possessing an undercurrent of turbulent romanticism and chromatic harmony coupled with the gift of genuine lyricism and a strength in projection of clear form."<sup>345</sup> When viewed by the musicologists, however, it seems that the political element overshadows an objective evaluation of these compositions.

Soviet musicologist Alekseev, for example, leaves out the important issue of modernistic experimentation in Aleksandrov's early post-revolutionary sonatas altogether, as he summarizes the characteristics of these works:

Aleksandrov's sonatas during this period show characteristic emotional contrasts, free improvisational manner of writing, lyric-narrative flow that is contrasted with the intruding impulsive passionate themes, whimsical turns of thought in the themes, and various virtuosic eloquent departures. Aside from this, early works of Aleksandrov are noticeable with their thoughtful architecture and clever use of the techniques that prevent the work from falling apart, such as motivic development and thematic relationships between the sections of the sonatas. Lyric themes are

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<sup>345</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 199.

characterized with passionate excitement and pathos, as well as refinement and heightened sensitivity.<sup>346</sup>

Alekseev's evaluation of the compositions, with his focus on lyricism and form, portrays Aleksandrov's work as merely successful, rather than extraordinary, a view consistent with most Soviet studies.

Even a more recent Soviet author, Kokushkin, cautions the readers of his study that the stylistic variety in Aleksandrov's music should not be considered a tendency toward a contemporary eclecticism. He writes:

The variety of styles and elements in Aleksandrov's work during this time does not have anything to do with the eclecticism, in which different styles are mechanically put together. The composer is consciously searching for 'similarities' with the 'handwriting' of the modern masters, whose separate achievements are intensively reworked by Aleksandrov; he later either dismisses them or includes them in his musical language.<sup>347</sup>

On the other hand, the critique of the American researcher Boris Schwarz, who spent a significant amount of time in Soviet Russia before publishing his monograph, discounts most of the works composed during this time period as mere products of their time and therefore, "failing to achieve greatness."<sup>348</sup> Schwarz states:

Much Soviet music composed during the 1920s is strangely barren and synthetic – music manufactured by composers who aimed at a certain effect, at a certain type of audience, and who tried to satisfy the demands of the day. Often, a momentary success was achieved, but it proved illusory because the music was conditioned by a set of circumstances that could not be duplicated.<sup>349</sup>

Australian author Larry Sitsky, while acknowledging Schwarz's study as "compulsory reading for anyone interested in this period," challenges his statement in

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<sup>346</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 35.

<sup>347</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 84.

<sup>348</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 61.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

arguing that the phenomenon of this time's music was "transitory because of suppression, not because it was artistically deficient."<sup>350</sup> Moreover, Sitsky criticizes Schwarz's greater concern for political events rather than musical, when he writes, "Sometimes in his book, Schwarz seems, because of cooperation by the Soviet authorities, to be too eager to please and to avoid politically sensitive matters too harshly. Anyway, Schwarz does not deal with the music, but rather with the events surrounding the music or the music surrounding the events."<sup>351</sup> However, in his ardent defense of the works from this time, Sitsky still views them through a political prism by bringing the "oppression" into the argument. Needless to say, the title of his study, "Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-garde," reflects his intention.

Finally, considering the political implications, one might wonder whether Aleksandrov's own opinion regarding his works during the 1920s was not affected by the situation of the time. In 1958, he wrote, "The 'modernistic tendencies' that were present in my compositions at that time and the earlier time were very experimental and only in small part reflected in the most substantial traits of my musical outlook."<sup>352</sup> It may not be coincidental that the composer revised his Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sonatas during the period of social realism and tighter control of formalistic practices. At the same time, one must consider that, keeping in mind Aleksandrov's artistic principles and values, it is possible that the reassessment of his earlier works was led by his creative preference and aesthetic choice.

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<sup>350</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, xi.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 69.

### The Social Realism Sonatas: No. 8 – No. 10

Unlike the 1920s that were characterized by stylistic diversity, the following decade exemplified more uniformity. The range of styles was gradually balanced in excluding formalistic practices, implementation of realism tendencies, and democratization of the arts, as well as the increased attention to folk art and the development of the nineteenth-century Russian traditions and their incorporation within the newer trends.<sup>353</sup> Largely dictated by the Soviet authorities, these practices defined composers' choices of the content and the expressive means in their music. Schwarz refers to this time as the "period of controlled restraints," and affirms that such a drastic change in the arts, compared to the previous decade, contributed to the crystallization of the unique style in Soviet music. He states, "Out of these conflicts arose a genuine Soviet style that reflected the travail and turbulence of the era."<sup>354</sup>

The war brought a new focus in music. In surveying the piano sonatas at the end of the 1930s and the 1940s, Alekseev observes different types of conflicts that were influenced by war images.<sup>355</sup> In addition, he points out that the main tendencies in the development of this genre were most distinct and successful in the works of Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and Aleksandrov.<sup>356</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Aleksandrov did not complete a piano sonata between 1932 and 1944, which makes it the longest interval of time between sonatas. The principal reason for such a long hiatus was clearly the circumstance of war, which resulted in

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<sup>353</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 69.

<sup>354</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 61.

<sup>355</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 158.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

Aleksandrov's evacuation and lack of resources, not to mention emotional hardship. Nevertheless, the composer did not fully abandon composition, as is shown in his work in film and theater music, revisions and arrangements of earlier pieces, as well as piano miniature and vocal music genres.

### Sonata No. 8, Opus. 50 (1939-1944), B-Flat Major

Aleksandrov's Eighth Piano Sonata was written during the Second World War, which explains the five-year long composition process. The details of the composer's work on this piece are found in a 1942 letter to pianist Vladimir Bunin, who performed and later recorded this sonata.<sup>357</sup> Aleksandrov composed the first two movements before the war. He initially envisioned a four-movement structure. He wrote the third movement, *Allegro agitato*, in 1941 during the evacuation in Nalchik. The finale was also begun in Nalchik, continued in Tbilisi, and finished in Moscow, upon Aleksandrov's return from the evacuation. While in Tbilisi, the composer decided that the third movement did not fit with the images and moods of the previous two movements, and in 1943 he suppressed it from the work. After reworking the finale to fit into a three-movement structure, the sonata was finally completed.

The Eighth Sonata, as with its two predecessors, is marked by clarity and simplicity of melodic material and transparency of pianistic texture. What distinguishes the sonata from all others, however, is that its thematic material is almost entirely built on folk songs and folk motives. In fact, as Kokushkin claims, it was the first Soviet sonata that was composed in this way, thus continuing the traditions of Glinka's

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<sup>357</sup> Blok, A. N. *Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 157.



“Kamarinskaya,” Balakirev’s “Islamey,” and Mussorgsky’s “Intermezzo,” among others.<sup>358</sup> Two of the melodies in the sonata are folk tune quotations, which Aleksandrov took from his “Eight Pieces on USSR Folk Melodies” written in 1937. The rest are composed in the folk idiom, utilizing the characteristic rhythms and melodic motives.

In a verbal commentary to Vladimir Bunin’s recording of the work, Aleksandrov described exactly what he had in mind when composing it. Fortunately, this commentary was recorded and published by Kokushkin.<sup>359</sup> It is now a valuable source that provides detailed information about the sonata.

The commentary reveals that in the first movement of the sonata, *Allegro giocoso*, Aleksandrov was aiming to reflect the vigorous and full life of the happy people in the USSR. He described the movement as “colorful and joyful.” He continued:

It is like a fair, a street-organ, a village celebration, a multi-colored crowd, a merry market... This is an imaginary happy country or sunny town, which lives life to its fullest. Here one finds moments of action, and lovers’ whispers, and active life – all depicted with the means of Russian and Asian themes. The national content of this sunny country is not homogenous.<sup>360</sup>

Both themes of the first movement’s sonata form are energetic and dance-like (Examples 5.29 and 5.30). The first theme is built on the B-flat Major pentatonic scale, while the second theme features F Lydian. The modal component adds refreshing color to the seemingly traditional tonic-dominant relationship, while a vibrant and active ostinato accompaniment forms the background figurations in imitation of folk instruments. The movement as a whole, with its frequent image changes, presents a collage of folk village scenes.

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<sup>358</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 131.

<sup>359</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 133-134.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

Example 5.29. Sonata No. 8, First movement, mm. 1-4



Example 5.30. Sonata No. 8, First movement, mm. 23-29



The second movement, *Andante cantabile e pensieroso*, is based on a dreamy and lyrical Chuvash folk song depicting love and nature (Ex. 5.31). Its melody, along with the original harmonization, is quoted at the beginning of the movement, after which it freely unfolds within a simple ternary structure. The climax is reached in the middle section, where at the height of intensity, the “dreadful outcall” is heard three times. These calls are very significant, since they are later transformed into victorious fanfares in the finale’s coda.

Example 5.31. Sonata No. 8, Second movement, mm. 1-5



The third movement was initially thought to be a reflection of war, but as Aleksandrov explained, since the war was ending at the time, the finale is, instead, a picture of celebration.<sup>361</sup> After the fanfare-like introduction, a quote of a Russian folk song is presented (Ex. 5.32). This song, in a character of an energetic male dance, becomes the first theme and the refrain of the rondo-sonata finale. The theme is repeated throughout the movement in multiple variants that include different harmonizations, articulations, and contrasting registers and texture. The dance-like second theme is more feminine in character. The two themes create an impression of a never-ending ecstatic animation.

Example 5.32. Sonata No. 8, Third movement, mm. 14-18



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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

The dance-like character is abandoned only in the central episode, which is more lyrical and gentle. Aleksandrov said that the whole movement depicts a mass activity, except for the middle part, which reflects the individual.<sup>362</sup> In the end, the celebration images dominate, as is evident in a majestic coda.

Working with the folk-inspired musical material presents certain challenges, as the piece might well result in sounding too simplistic. Aleksandrov had to solve this problem by implementing a variety of compositional techniques, incorporating modification of motives, metric and rhythmic manipulations, variation of timbre and texture, and changes of harmonization. Alekseev even feels that Aleksandrov's methods were partially in the style of Stravinsky.<sup>363</sup> Further aided by the compact structure, the author has succeeded in achieving a balanced yet colorful composition permeated with folk music.

The Eighth Sonata was positively received by the critic V. Kiselev, as evident in his review of the composer's performance of the piece in 1943 in Moscow. Kiselev notes the overall brisk and optimistic character of the sonata, as well as the simple sincerity of the *Andante*, the best movement of the work, in his opinion.<sup>364</sup> In addition, he observes the dance-like atmosphere and rhythmic variety of the finale, though he also points to the impression that the movement is "overly extended."<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 177.

<sup>364</sup> V. Kiselev, "Showcase of the Soviet Music. The Second Concert," *Vechernaya Moskva* [Evening Moscow], no. 62 (1943): 3.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

Aleksandrov was happy with his Eighth Sonata, as evident from his correspondence<sup>366</sup> and the fact that in 1978 he orchestrated it to form his Second Symphony. This transformation of sonata into symphony is quite unusual and perhaps unique in music literature.

#### Sonata No. 9, Opus 61 (1945), C Minor

Aleksandrov's first postwar sonata reflects the theme of youth and hope for the brighter future after the war. With its simple lyricism and active themes, its character and images are close to other postwar pieces created around the same time by contemporary Soviet composers, for example, Prokofiev's Ninth Sonata (1947), Kabalevsky's Third Sonata (1946) and the Third "Youth" Concerto (1952), and Shostakovich's Second Concerto (1957).

The sonata's theme is not only revealed in the character of its music, but is also in Aleksandrov's own words. In conversations with Kokushkin, the composer said that he initially planned a one-movement children's sonatina. Eventually, however, it grew beyond the dimensions of an instructional piece and turned into a three-movement cycle "for adults about youth."<sup>367</sup> In addition, the piece was appropriately dedicated to Elena Fabianovna Gnessina, who along with her sisters founded the Gnessin Institute in Moscow, today known as Gnessin State Musical College – a highly established venue for the study of music.

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<sup>366</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 157.

<sup>367</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 132.

The stylistic features continue the tendencies of the previous three sonatas. The traditional three-movement architecture presents a compact first movement in sonata allegro form (*Allegro moderato*), lyrical middle movement in simple ternary structure (*Andante ma non troppo*), and rondo-sonata Finale (*Allegro*). The tendency toward even clearer and simpler writing with more transparent texture than before is evident. Clearly defined and symmetrically built themes, often elaborated with chromatic countermelodies and enriched with colorful harmonies, are consistent throughout the sonata. Typically for Aleksandrov, the themes are also influenced by the genre elements of song, marches, and dances.

The motivic relationships between all themes of the sonata are more sophisticated than in the previous sonatas. Based on small melodic seeds, these connections affect each subsequent theme, creating an impression of continuous development, and sometimes making it difficult to define structural boundaries (Ex. 5.33). For instance, the closing theme in the first movement, based on the first theme's motive, seamlessly initiates the development. Kokushkin compares such "virtuosic thematic manipulation" with Stravinsky's techniques.<sup>368</sup>

The sonata's pianistic texture consists primarily of figurations that are based on hand positions, which might have originated in the composer's initial intention to create a sonatina. Additionally, there are passages where the material is distributed between the right and the left hands, includes small scalar technique, and incorporates some polyphonic playing. All this make the sonata technically accessible for a performer.

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 133.

**Example 5.33. Sonata No. 9, First movement, first theme, connecting theme, and second theme**

a) mm. 1-4  
**Allegro moderato**

b) mm. 29-32

c) mm. 39-42

It is somewhat surprising that of all Aleksandrov's piano sonatas, the Ninth is the most unknown. Its attractive themes, vibrant contrasts, energetic drive, compact structure, technical accessibility, and the integrity of musical meaning – all would normally promote popularity. Nevertheless, aside from a mere three-paragraph overview in Kokushkin's study, there is very little information about this work. Although Kokushkin states that this sonata was one of the most popular in the pianists' repertoire,<sup>369</sup> no recordings or reviews can be found. Perhaps the competition from the stylistically similar works by Prokofiev, Kabalevsky, and Shostakovich has overshadowed Aleksandrov's sonata and stood in the way of its success.

Sonata No. 10, Opus 72 (1950-1951), F Major

Aleksandrov's Tenth Piano Sonata renews the theme of the ardent love of life, expressed earlier in the Second, Fourth, and, to an extent, the Eighth Sonatas. This theme,

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

which strongly resonated with Aleksandrov's personal philosophy, was initially inspired by Lu Andreas-Salome's poem that Aleksandrov found in Zhilyaev's collection of Nietzsche's works.<sup>370</sup> The latter used the last stanza of Andreas-Salome's poem in his composition "Hymn to Life." Its open and fervent text greatly moved Aleksandrov and found its reflection in this sonata.

There is much evidence of Aleksandrov's intention to depict the poem's idea in the Tenth Sonata. First, the idea is portrayed in the inscriptions at the beginning of the first and the third movements. Second, according to Aleksandrov's recollections stated in the article from the *Sovetsky Muzykant* [The Soviet Musician] publication, he planned to entitle the first movement "Hymn to Life."<sup>371</sup> Finally, in conversations with Kokushkin, the composer revealed that in this sonata he wanted to express the thoughts and feelings that preoccupied him during the postwar period, when all people around him were fighting for life and peace.<sup>372</sup>

While Aleksandrov's initially conceived title is absent in the published version, its meaning is embedded in the inscription above the first movement, which comes from Alexander Blok's poem "Oh, Spring." The fragment reads, "I discover you, life! I accept you, and welcome you with a clang of the shield!"<sup>373</sup> It is known that before the sonata's publication Aleksandrov was also pondering another inscription, which contained the words of Vladimir Mayakovsky that read, "Life is beautiful and wondrous."<sup>374</sup> The

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<sup>370</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 121-22.

<sup>371</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 123.

<sup>372</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 137.

<sup>373</sup> Zheleznaya, "Aleksander Blok. 62.," <http://zheleznaya.wordpress.com/category/russian/>, accessed September 21, 2013.

<sup>374</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 123.



reason for changing them to Blok's quote in the final version is not clear. Nevertheless, both inscriptions carry a similar message, with Blok's words being perhaps more dramatic.

Emotionally uplifting and highly energetic, the sonata is suffused with powerful and determined character reflecting the "Hymn to Life" concept. This is particularly evident in the outer movements, where the fanfare-like themes and sweeping figurations create a majestic atmosphere and relentless drive.

The pianistic texture also contributes to the dramatic idea and the character of the piece. Unlike in the earlier more transparent sonatas, elaborate and impressive piano writing predominates in the Tenth, presenting passages of thick chords and octaves, broad arpeggios, and resonant bass lines. Such a "concerto-like" texture, as Kokushkin calls it,<sup>375</sup> helps to depict the sonata's grandeur and monumentality.

Aleksandrov's three-movement work begins with a sonata allegro movement. As mentioned above, the movement was thought to be named "Hymn to Life." The first theme opens with a unison fanfare motive (Ex. 5.34). Bold, direct, and march-like, it immediately determines the character of the composition and becomes a leitmotif, penetrating the first movement and returning in the last, transformed into a powerful hymn.

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 138.

Example 5.34. Sonata No. 10, First movement, mm. 1-5



Example 5.35. Sonata No. 10, First movement, mm. 32-33



The second theme enters as a contrast to the first; it is more gentle, light, and poetic. It highlights the melodic element, which brings out the theme's singing quality. Stated in double thirds, the theme is marked by juxtaposition of major and minor color and polyrhythm creating a refreshing atmosphere (Ex. 5.35).

A closer look at the left hand's accompaniment reveals that it contains motivic material of the first theme. Because of this, Kokushkin suggests considering this movement monothematic.<sup>376</sup> The beginning motive is also present in the connecting theme, which supports Kokushkin's point, but is not included in the closing theme. The

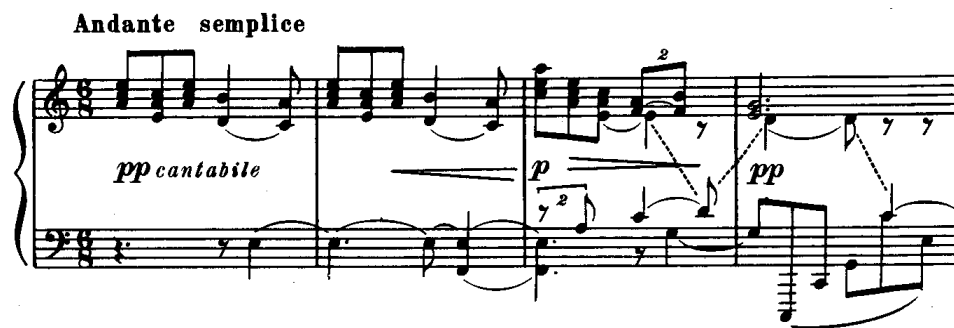
<sup>376</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 135.

chromatic sixteenth-note-figurations characterize both the connecting and the closing themes, relating them thematically.

The second movement is a calm and pensive song. Aleksandrov's envisioned title for this movement was "Elegy" with the inscription from Aleksandr Pushkin, which can be translated as, "I feel sadness and relief. My sorrow is light." As with the first movement, upon publication the title was omitted and the inscription remained. Aleksandrov commented that the music of the second movement is supposed to be a light reminiscence of friends who have passed away.<sup>377</sup>

The second movement is composed in simple ternary form. Its outer sections feature a lullaby-like melody (Ex. 5.36). The diatonic statement of the theme, particularly the A minor – C Major – E minor – A minor cadence scheme, suggests a relationship to the Russian folk song tradition.

Example 5.36. Sonata No. 10, Second movement, mm. 1-4



The middle section of the movement is intensified with sixteenth-note counterpoint and chromatic harmony. After an emotional climax, the initial theme and harmonization returns in the recapitulation. Its texture is significantly modified by the

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<sup>377</sup> Blok, A. N. *Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 124.

register change and the retention of the middle section's sixteenth-note chromatic counterpoint, suggesting an atmosphere of anxiety in the accompaniment.

The third movement is a stormy and impulsive finale in sonata allegro form. Dramatically, this movement is related to the first. The initial idea of glorifying life mutates into a struggle for it. To illustrate this, Aleksandrov chose the Russian translation of the well-known words from Goethe's *Faust* as the inscription to the third movement, which can be translated into English as, "Of freedom and of life he only is deserving, Who every day must conquer them anew."<sup>378</sup>

The first theme of the movement consists primarily of vigorous triplet figurations with occasional outbursts of declamatory motives, creating an impression of a continuous stream of ever-increasing energy. The second theme, too, is affected by this atmosphere. Although it is more melodic, its accompaniment continues in persistent triplets. Kokushkin finds a thematic relationship between the second movement's middle section and the first theme of the finale and between the leitmotif and finale's second theme.<sup>379</sup> This relationship, however, is very subtle and noticeable only on a motivic level.

The connecting theme of the finale introduces a new motive: a short march-like pattern with the characteristic dotted rhythm. This motive not only brings another wave of energy, but in the closing theme develops into a powerful march that quotes the chorus from the "Hymn of the Democratic Youth" by Alexander Novikov. Aleksandrov stated that this hymn symbolized the fight for life.<sup>380</sup> A short development is based on the march

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<sup>378</sup> The original German text reads, "Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben der täglich sie erobern muss."

<sup>379</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 135.

<sup>380</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 124.

motif. Following it, the recapitulation then returns to the dynamic atmosphere of the beginning, but becomes quieter in the modified statement of the second theme, where the similarity to the leitmotif becomes more obvious. This contrast was necessary in order to prepare the climax, which leads to the coda's final victorious statement of the leitmotif.

The Tenth Piano Sonata in many ways continues the traditions of Aleksandrov's established style, as evident in the three-movement structure, the choice of characters, and the motivic relationship between themes. At the same time, it brings back the dramatic ideas and elaborate pianistic writing typical of his early style. As a result, the work presents a synthesis of the composer's past and present writing, preparing the way for the late works. Simple lyrical melodies, subtle colorful triadic harmonies implementing a mixture of modes and the interplay of the relative and parallel tonalities, rich modulations, march-like rhythms, and the contrast of transparent and thicker textures, all characterize the remaining four sonatas.

#### The Late Works: No. 11 – No. 14

The sonatas written during the late period of Aleksandrov's life present the result of his long artistic journey. They reflect the work of a mature composer, who had tried various means of expression, experienced a diversity of influences, and eventually emerged as an individual artist. Kokushkin observes that Aleksandrov's late period parallels the last stage of the development in Soviet music in general, and summarizes it as the "renovation and synthesis of his achieved work."<sup>381</sup> In his last sonatas,

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<sup>381</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 34.

Aleksandrov most genuinely reflected his personal and artistic convictions that through the years had crystallized into an established style.

Sonata No. 11, Opus 81 (1955), C Major

*“Sonata-Fantasy”*

In contrast with the zealous determination of the previous work, the Sonata-Fantasy is distinguished by its overall intimate and poetic character. In this piece, the majestic and victorious images are replaced by warm and gentle pictures of nature, graceful folk dance scenes, and at times, turbulent reminiscences and pensive reflections. This emotional mood is closer to the Seventh and Ninth Sonatas, than the Tenth.

It is very likely that the Sonata-Fantasy’s nature-inspired images came from the magnificence of the Nikolina Mountain, where Aleksandrov composed the piece. This place, located near the Moscow region, was a favorite destination for Russian artists to rest and work. Composers such as Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, and Shebalin spent many creative hours at the Nikolina Mountain.

In addition to its poetic character, the Sonata-Fantasy is distinguished by its creative structure. While Aleksandrov presented the typical three-movement format in this composition, the close musical relationships between the themes and their transformations, compression of some sections, as well as the indications of *attaca*, create an impression of continuous evolvement from beginning to end. Moreover, in this piece Aleksandrov frequently departed from a symmetrical statement of the themes, producing a more improvisational presentation of the material. Thus, the Eleventh Sonata’s title “Sonata-Fantasy” appropriately corresponds with its nature.

The sonata's main musical material is presented in the first movement, a gentle and carefree theme (Ex. 5.37). The transparency of texture, the pentatonic-based language, the statement in parallel fourths, and the flowing rhythmic interplay of triplets and duplets create a pastoral character and impressionistic aura, thus evoking the image of nature.

Example 5.37. Sonata-Fantasy (No. 11). First movement, mm. 1-5



The importance of this theme is twofold. First, it acts as a leitmotif, as in the Tenth sonata, returning in both the second and third movements in either unchanged or transformed setting. For example, after the theme dominates the first movement, it reappears in its initial form in the third movement, just before the middle section (mm. 37-42).

When it is heard in the development of the second movement, however, it arrives as the climax of the movement, stated fortissimo in large chords and supported by bass octaves (Ex. 5.38). Moreover, its return in the middle section of the third movement takes on a dance-like character, adopting a characteristic dotted rhythm (Ex. 5.39). This version of the motif, in a more subdued setting, also concludes the sonata.

Example 5.38. Sonata-Fantasy (No. 11). Second movement, mm. 71-75



Example 5.39. Sonata-Fantasy (No. 11). Third movement, mm. 43-46



Second, the beginning melodic material of the first movement also acts as the main thematic germ, out of which grow all other themes of the sonata. Based primarily on the intervals of minor third, perfect fourth, and major second, its melodic content is related to the first movement's second theme, the second movement's first and second themes, and the first theme of the third movement. Due to such melodic interrelationships, the sonata is perceived as a unified whole.

Structurally, the composition presents interesting situations. The compact forty-two-measure first movement, though presenting two distinct themes, suggests an improvised introduction. Following without a pause, the more substantial second movement is built according to the sonata allegro principle, with an impulsive agitated first theme (Ex. 5.40) and a lyrical second theme. The development section, as mentioned earlier, reinstates the texturally and dynamically transformed theme of the first movement. Kokushkin points out that because of this, the section acts as both the



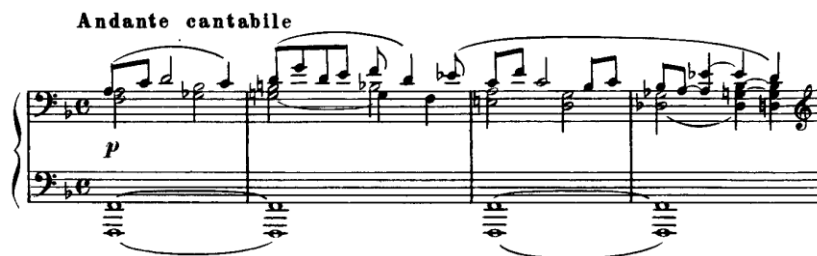
development of the second movement and the recapitulation of the first.<sup>382</sup> Moreover, the second movement's recapitulation is drastically shortened by excluding the first theme altogether and including only a fragment of the second.

**Example 5.40. Sonata-Fantasy (No. 11). Second movement, mm. 1-2**



Finally, noteworthy is the construction of the third movement. The outer sections of its compound ternary form are based on an epic narrative: an expressive melody in a style of Russian folk song, characteristic of Aleksandrov's slow movement themes (Ex. 5.41). The central section introduces a contrasting character with dance-like rhythms and a faster tempo. The recapitulation unites both characters in counterpoint and reaches a climax that reasserts the domination of the initial narrative theme. As a result, the third movement's structure combines features of a slow movement, exemplified by the song-like theme, a scherzo, in lighthearted character, and a finale, containing the synthesis of both themes and the climax.

**Example 5.41. Third movement, mm 1-4**



<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 141.

As a whole, the Sonata-Fantasia is a well-shaped rounded structure, although its movements are not independent enough to stand alone. Its architecture is sufficiently unique to allow various interpretations. It can be considered a one-movement composition, where the introduction is represented by the first movement, development by the second, and recapitulation by the third. It can also be viewed as a two-movement piece with the initial two movements combined into one, with the first being an introduction. In addition, the scherzo-like elements in the third movement give the impression of a four-movement format. Such flexibility of structure distinguishes the Sonata-Fantasy as one of the most creative works Aleksandrov composed.

Aleksandrov's tonal language in the Sonata-Fantasy is notable because it united classical traditions with modern means of expression, which were more characteristic of Aleksandrov's early compositions. While major and minor are at the core of the harmonic language in this piece, they are frequently juxtaposed with the pentatonic scale (the first movement), the octatonic scale (the second movement; see Ex. 5.40), and modes (Mixolydian color in the third movement; see Ex. 5.41). Additionally, alongside the traditional harmonies such as triads, seventh and ninth chords, one finds the quartal and quintal chords, split-third and multi-functional chords, which bring the non-traditional sonorities in order to create additional color.

The Sonata-Fantasy is one of the most poetic and most creative pieces in Aleksandrov's output in the genre. It differs from other sonatas with innovations in form and earlier unexplored images. Despite its creative advantages, however, the sonata was not often performed after its premiere by Tatiana Nikolayeva in 1956. Nearly two decades later, Aleksandrov was showing the composition to pianist Leonora Iosiovich,

who was surprised that no one played the piece anymore.<sup>383</sup> After the composer remarked that the younger generation tends to forget old people, Iosiovich revived the sonata by recording it for the Melodiya label.<sup>384</sup>

### Sonata No. 12, Opus 87 (1961), B Minor

Aleksandrov's Twelfth Sonata was written during the period of the composer's increased creative activity in the early 1960s. Besides two sonatas, the Twelfth and Thirteenth, Aleksandrov, in his seventies, produced numerous piano miniatures, songs, a symphonic poem, and even his first symphony. Several factors may explain such abundant output during this time. One is his retirement from the conservatory which opened up more time for composition. Another is Aleksandrov's mourning of his deceased wife, daughter, and close friends Nataliya Polenova and Samuil Fienberg that found an emotional outlet in musical creation.

The Twelfth Sonata exemplifies most of the composer's essential stylistic features that crystallized in the previous works. Most of these features are well summarized in the recollections of Aleksandrov's student Leonid Mazel upon his listening to the composer's performance of the piece during a visit to his home. Mazel recalls the sonata's striking narrative and lyrical qualities, as well as its fantastic episodes and delicate colors. He also points out that in general the piece was surrounded with "wondrous poeticism," as well as distinguished by the elegant simplicity of the melodious middle movement.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 109.

<sup>384</sup> Aleksandrov, *Fortepiannye Sonaty. [Sound Recording]*.

<sup>385</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 223.

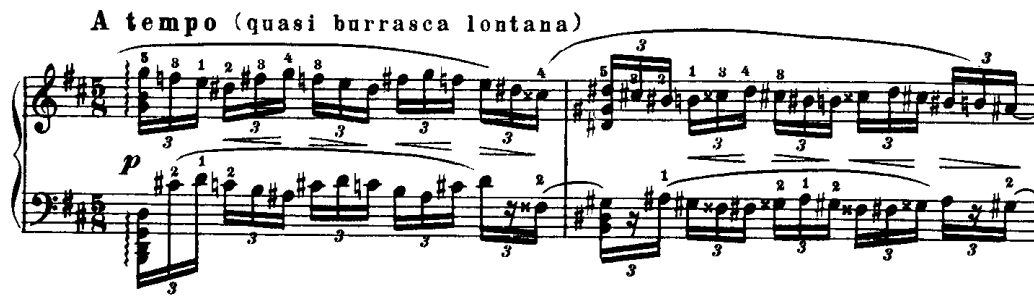
The narrative and lyrical qualities noticed by Mazel are evident throughout the sonata in such passages as the introduction (Ex. 5.42), the first theme, and most of the development in the initial movement, the outer sections of the second movement, and the middle episode of the finale. The fantastic effects and colors appear most vividly in the first movement's connecting theme, when Aleksandrov paints the picture of winter flurries (Ex. 5.43). Indicated by *quasi burrasca lontanta*, this passage's fast and seemingly scattered, yet pianistic, figurations in 5/8 time create a vibrant coloristic effect that occurs multiple times throughout the movement.

In addition, Aleksandrov's treatment of the sonata's three-movement scheme in his late period should be noted. The broad first movement contains the essence of the sonata's dramatic concept, which is expressed in the introduction (Ex. 5.42). The images of a complex personal emotional world on one hand, and the scenes of winter on the other, permeate the musical fabric of the first movement. Its shortened recapitulation and the intense coda are characteristic of the composer's endings of sonata allegro movements.

Example 5.42. Sonata No. 12, First movement, mm. 1-10

The musical score for Example 5.42, Sonata No. 12, First movement, mm. 1-10, is presented in two systems. The first system, marked "Impetuoso, un poco sostenuto" and "Un poco", features a piano part with a triplet of eighth notes and a violin part with a triplet of eighth notes. The second system, marked "più mosso, animato assai" and "cantabile", shows a piano part with a triplet of eighth notes and a violin part with a triplet of eighth notes. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings like "f", "p", "m.d.", and "m.s.".

Example 5.43. Sonata No. 12, First movement, mm. 20-21



The simple lyrical second movement includes an extensive scherzo-like episode as its middle section (*Allegro giocoso*, mm. 117-155). This feature, as in the Eleventh Sonata, adds another layer to the work's structure. Kokushkin defines this technique as the “symphonization” of the piano sonata genre and points out that such “multi-layering” is more typical of piano concertos.<sup>386</sup> The finale's central episode in the development section, too, presents a comparable situation, where the dominating first theme's energetic dance in 5/8 is suddenly contrasted with an expressive lyrical melody (*Pensieroso, espressivo, con emozio cantabile*, mm. 98-132).

Aleksandrov's treatment of themes in the Twelfth Sonata reflects the composer's skill and experience. All the themes of the piece derive from the introductory section. By combining its melodic element of the descending triad and the ascending scalar tetrachord with the rhythmic element of a triplet and dotted figures, Aleksandrov created a multitude of characters. This type of thematic manipulation can also be observed in the Ninth Sonata.

Finally, it must be noted that the sonata's texture is considerably less transparent than in the previous work. This is mainly evident in the outer movements, where the

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<sup>386</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 144.

frequent statements in octaves and chords, along with the active “flurry-like” figurations and powerful climaxes, noticeably enrich and thicken the musical space. In this aspect, the sonata is related to the Tenth. Despite the heavier texture, the sonata is very pianistic, as would be expected from a composer-pianist.

Sonata No. 13, Opus 90 (1964), F-Sharp Minor

*The “Sonata-Fairy-Tale”*

As explained earlier, Aleksandrov’s Thirteenth Sonata is a reconstruction of his First, written during the composer’s student years. Although some of the earlier sonata’s musical material was left unchanged in the new one, the work essentially presents a new piece. This point is stressed in Aleksandrov’s own explanation in the 1968 published edition of the work, where he clearly states that the piece should not be considered a revision of the First Sonata, since aside from its first theme and parts of the connecting theme and the coda, the new sonata is composed from new material.<sup>387</sup> At the same time, he points out that the new sonata completely embodies his previous ideas.<sup>388</sup> Thus, as a compromise, Aleksandrov suggests calling it a “new sonata on an old theme.”<sup>389</sup>

Kokushkin’s conversations with the composer reveal that after finishing one movement of the Thirteenth Sonata, Aleksandrov started to compose a second movement, Theme and Variations, and intended to write a finale as well. However, the first movement became so substantial and succinct that there was no need for more

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<sup>387</sup> Aleksandrov, *Sochineniya, dlya fortepiano*, 339.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

movements.<sup>390</sup> Thus, the sonata remained a one-movement composition, like the First. The projected second movement's theme and its three variations were later included in the Fourteenth Sonata and reworked accordingly.

When comparing the First and the Thirteenth Sonatas, the difference in their size strikes the most. The old sonata's 195 measure length was nearly doubled in the 349 measures of the new sonata. It is also noteworthy that the beginning and the end of both sonatas are practically identical. The first twenty measures are unchanged in the new sonata, with the exception of the first note, the low F-sharp, which was omitted by the composer. The thirty measures of the coda are also left unmodified, even in their smallest details, such as dynamics, articulation, and expressive markings. The only change in this section is that the sonata's original ending idea was expanded from two measures to eight. The second theme, although reworked more significantly than the two sections described above, preserves the initial texture, melodic motives, and Lydian color, as well as some rhythm. The main difference lies in this theme's development, which is more extensive than in the First Sonata. For example, in the development section, the fragmented second theme appears in syncopated low register octaves against the quintuplet pattern.

The Thirteenth Sonata is generally less complicated rhythmically. While the role of a quintuplet is still important in this piece, the work does not overwhelm with the variety of asymmetrical patterns found in the First Sonata. The whimsical sixteenth-note figurations, abundant in the First Sonata's development section, are also omitted in the Thirteenth and instead replaced by a variety of articulations.

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<sup>390</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 144-45.

The melodic content of the new sonata is more lyrical than in the previous work and derived from the Russian song tradition. This resulted in more diatonic tonal content and warmer colors characteristic of Aleksandrov's late compositional style. The themes are developed according to the monothematic principle, preserved from the First Sonata. The end of the development section, however, includes a notable new episode, *come da lontano*, where a simple melody, accompanied by the quintuplets and supported by the low pedal points, gradually descends from the high register (Ex. 5.44). This not only creates a colorful yet intimate atmosphere, but also contributes to the national element in the sonata, since the melody is based on a Russian horn folk tune.<sup>391</sup>

**Example 5.44. Sonata No. 13, mm. 212-222**

The similarity between the more prominent sections of the sonatas, namely the main themes and the coda, leads to the conclusion that Aleksandrov was quite satisfied

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 145.



with the main musical concept and the thematic material of his first work. His modifications seem to be mainly centered on the intention to simplify the work and develop its themes in a more mature and skillful way.

The sonata was first performed in 1968 in Moscow by Aleksandrov's student Victor Bunin. In preparation for the premiere, Aleksandrov took great care in coaching the performer. Bunin recalls that the composer was very particular about the exposition of the piece. He also insisted upon achieving precise expression in the "pleading" motive of the main theme, correctly executing singing accents of the quintuplets' third notes, finding a specific dry staccato articulation for aggressive basses, and using thick pedal to create the haunting pensive melody of the second theme.<sup>392</sup> Such attention to detail illustrates not only Aleksandrov's extraordinary commitment to the craft of his music, but also his confidence as a mature artist.

#### Sonata No. 14, Opus 97 (1971), E Major

Aleksandrov's last piano sonata represents the final crystallization of the composer's style. In this piece, the characteristic heroic-tragic, lyric, and narrative images, the polished structure, the song-like themes, and the transparent piano texture enriched with polyphony all come together with more certainty than in the earlier sonatas. The emphasis on the melodic element is evident throughout the sonata, particularly in the main themes and their development. At the same time, the contrasts are achieved by the frequent changes in mood, which are expressed by the variety of texture, registers, articulation, and dynamics, as well as by the introduction of new motives.

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<sup>392</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 185.

The Fourteenth Sonata has a two-movement structure, with the first movement constituting a sonata allegro form, and the second movement presenting the theme with six variations. Such format is rare for Aleksandrov's sonatas; aside from the Fourteenth, a similar construction can be found only in the Fifth. Coincidentally, the analogous principle is seen in the last piano sonata of Beethoven (Opus 111).

The first movement was composed in 1967, while the second was begun in 1964 and completed in 1971.<sup>393</sup> As mentioned above, the second movement was originally intended for the Thirteenth Sonata, but Aleksandrov's decision led to moving it to the Fourteenth, where the theme and the three variations were retained from the earlier composition, with three more variations added to fit the new scheme. From the correspondence with Kokushkin, it is known that Aleksandrov was considering a three-movement structure, but in the end determined that the two-movement structure is more natural in this work.<sup>394</sup> Recalling the previous sonata, it should be noted that the composer also planned to create three movements, but contrary to the case of the Fourteenth Sonata, it resulted in retaining the one-movement scheme.

The Fourteenth Sonata's first movement, *Allegretto carezzevole*, has a very clear sonata form with repeated exposition. Its first theme is a carefree lyrical melody in E Major (Ex. 5.45). Aleksandrov called this theme "idyllic" and pointed out its similarity to the first theme of the Sixth Sonata in its light and calm character.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 146.

<sup>394</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 137.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

**Example 5.45. Sonata No. 14, First movement, mm. 1-8**



He also explained that in this theme he aimed to create a long melody without repeating phrases, so that the listener perceives it in one breath.<sup>396</sup> The second theme is more somber, which is distinguished not only by the key of G-sharp minor, but also by the preceding sudden tritone call (m. 30). This prominent motive becomes significant in the sonata. Aleksandrov referred to this moment as the “tragic hint,” which plays a significant dramatic role in the variations.<sup>397</sup> Immediately following the tritone motive, the three repeated accented notes form a new motive (Ex. 5.46). After sounding twice, it becomes the basis for the second theme and gains consistently more prominence in the development, recapitulation, and the variations. In addition to the two motives described above, the emotionally charged closing theme introduces a horn-call figure, which also reappears in several places in the sonata. These motives strategically contribute to the sonata’s overall structure, acting as contrasting characters on one hand, and as unifying elements on the other.

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

**Example 5.46. Sonata No. 14, First movement, mm. 29-35**

The final movement of the sonata begins with a simple narrative lyrical theme. Its general character, the tonal color, marked by the mixolydian mode and major-minor exchanges, as well as the metric and rhythmic contour, all create a folklike character (Ex. 5.47). The theme is constructed in symmetrical phrases in a rounded binary structure.

**Example 5.47. Sonata No. 14, Second movement, mm. 1-4**

The following six variations retain this structure and the tonal plan of the theme, while varying the key, tempo, the melodic contour, the texture, and other elements. This type of variation stems from the traditions of Beethoven and Schumann, as well as being employed by such Russian composers as Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, and Medtner.

Aleksandrov's variations in the Fourteenth Sonata, although following a tradition, present several original aspects. Specifically, they have a dramatic character and its

melodic and tonal relationships to the first movement. The tritone call motive that appears in the end of the third variation abruptly changes the peaceful course of the music. It opens the short section titled *Interludium*, which uses the tritone intonation to prepare the dark and tragic fourth variation marked *Marcia funebre*. Aleksandrov remarked that by the end of this variation the listener should be confused and ask, “What is next?”<sup>398</sup>

The fifth variation evokes the first theme from the first movement, which may be perceived as an attempt to return to the lighthearted mood of the sonata. The variation reaches its climax in another *Interludium* section, which presents a three-part canon based on the material of the first movement’s theme. The exuberant mood, however, is again suddenly interrupted by the darker second theme. This concludes the interlude and prepares the sixth variation, marked *Coda*, which restates the main theme of the variations and brings the composition to a quiet and luminous E-Major ending.

The manuscript of the work contains a subtitle for each variation: Var. 1, *The Fairy Tale*, Var. 2, *The Nocturne*, Var.3, *The Game* (Scherzino), Var. 4, *The Funeral Procession*, Var. 5, *The Echoes*, and Var. 6, *The Epitaph* (Coda). Aleksandrov decided to remove these upon publication because he thought that these titles were turning the piece into a suite-like composition and took the performer’s attention away from the work’s main purpose, which is a depiction of continuous development.<sup>399</sup> This statement shows that for Aleksandrov, the multi-movement structure was an expression of a single dramatic idea in various phases. His concern about the disjuncture of sections is

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>399</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 147.

understandable, especially when considering the vividly contrasting characters of the first three variations.

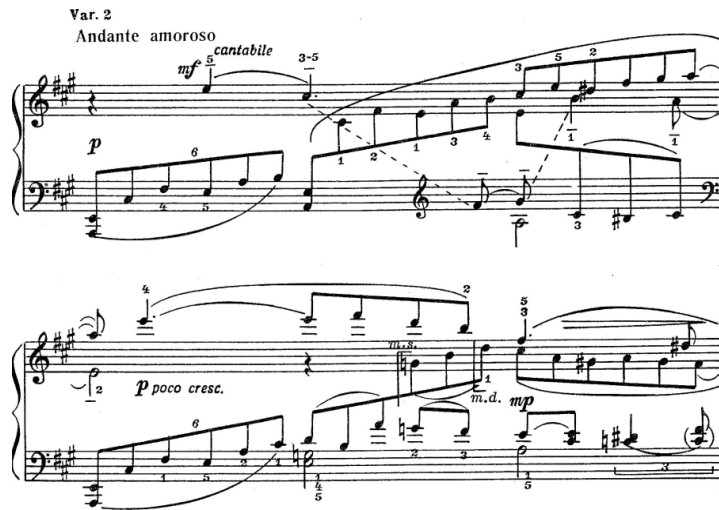
Among the six variations, the first and the second are particularly distinguished by their original use of rhythm, articulation, and color. Variation 1 is composed in 15/8, with the characteristic “Fairy-Tale” motives and rhythmic emphasis observed in the First and the Thirteenth Sonatas (Ex. 5.48). Moreover, the recurring three repeated note motive from the first movement echoes similar images to those of Medtner’s “Fairy-Tales” and Rachmaninov’s “Etudes-Tableaux.” Variation 2 is distinguished by delicate and sophisticated color marked by register changes and graceful polyrhythms, including sextuplets against quadruplets, triplets against duplets (Ex. 5.49), creating a poetic and improvised effect that contrasts well with the adjacent variations.

**Example 5.48. Sonata No. 14, Second movement, mm. 17-20**

Var. I  
Più mosso, allegretto

The musical score for Variation I of Sonata No. 14, Second movement, measures 17-20, is presented in two systems. The first system shows a piano (p) dynamic in the right hand and a mezzo-forte (m.f.) dynamic in the left hand, with a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The second system shows a piano (p) dynamic in the right hand and a mezzo-forte (m.f.) dynamic in the left hand, with a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The right hand features a recurring three repeated note motive. The left hand features a sextuplet against a quadruplet, a triplet against a duplet, and a sextuplet against a quadruplet.

**Example 5.49. Sonata No. 14, Second movement, mm. 34-35**



Aleksandrov's Fourteenth Sonata was dedicated to his student Victor Bunin, who championed Aleksandrov's piano music and frequently premiered his compositions. This sonata, however, was first performed by the composer himself, who, after a fourteen-year break from playing in public, reappeared on a Moscow stage as soloist.

Kokushkin considers Aleksandrov's last sonata as "one of the most delicate and inspiring masterpieces . . . and one of the best examples of this genre in Soviet music."<sup>400</sup> He also notes that with its precise voice leading, extreme transparency of piano texture, and most importantly, the predominance of lyric images and moods, the composition is in tradition of the late sonatas of Prokofiev (No. 9), Miaskovsky (op. 82-84), and Feinberg (No. 12).<sup>401</sup>

<sup>400</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 229-30.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

### Summary

The survey presenting Anatoly Aleksandrov's fourteen piano sonatas provides much valuable information concerning the composer's style within the context of historical events in his personal and professional life. The analysis of the essential musical elements, such as form, melody, harmony, rhythm, and texture allows a deeper understanding of Aleksandrov's compositional technique, while the examination of the image content uncovers the ways in which the composer implemented his musical convictions in his work. In addition, the consideration of musical and socio-historical influences contributes to the study of Aleksandrov's growth as an artist.

Perhaps the most significant discovery of this survey is the process of evolution in Aleksandrov's style. Moreover, the change occurs not only in the musical language, but in the composer's choice of content.

Aleksandrov's student work, the First Sonata, is characterized by the tendency toward the music of the lyric-philosophic attitudes through the use of original melodic patterns and creative treatment of harmony and texture. The composer's style during this period was still strongly influenced by Scriabin, Medtner, and Debussy.

The compositions of the 1920s show Aleksandrov as a mature, yet still searching composer, whose style is closely related to the traditions of Russian Romanticism. His attention shifts toward more dramatic images in this decade, and such twentieth century music tools as extreme dissonance, frequent key changes, and freedom in metric construction, became more significant in his work.

Aleksandrov's work during the years of Socialist Realism and the Second World War (1930s and 1940s), is supplemented with heroic and sometimes tragic images, while



the lyrical and dramatic images become complicated and intensified due to the war environment. In addition, starting with the Seventh Sonata, the role of folk and social images becomes more prominent in his compositions. As pointed out by Kokushkin, even the lyricism in the works of this time turns “more social than personal.”<sup>402</sup> The musical language displays the tendency toward simplification and transparency of expression, particularly in the areas of harmony and texture.

Aleksandrov’s late sonatas display delicacy and subtlety of poetic expression, as well as depth and nobility of thought. The musical content focuses on the complexity of life’s contradictions, the struggles of human passions, and praise of everything light and joyful, with only occasional tragic images. Wise and philosophical thoughts permeate this period’s lyricism. In terms of compositional technique, the late sonatas are distinguished with polished architecture and refined detail. Along with the transparency of textures and simplicity of expression, more elaborate and complex episodes occur. Kokushkin suggests, however, that these episodes should not be viewed as a return to his early period; rather, they illustrate the composer’s broad imagination and his ability to write genuine and convincing music, while combining complexity with simplicity and clarity with rich sound.<sup>403</sup>

This discussion leads to a general observation that until the late 1920s Aleksandrov’s style undergoes the process of sophistication, in which his musical language is intensified by the use of the latest compositional techniques. After the Sixth Sonata, however, it gradually becomes simplified through the employment of more

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<sup>402</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 32.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

transparent textures and clearer melodic development. This artistic path was followed by other composers who began their careers slightly before or after the Revolution, including Miaskovsky, Kabalevsky, Feinberg, and Shebalin.

### General Suggestions For Interpretation

Consideration of the stylistic aspects of Aleksandrov's music leads pianists to more prudent interpretation choices when performing his sonatas. Furthermore, it is important to take into account the composer's pianism in his own performances of his works, his directions to students, and the numerous expressive markings in his scores.

Aleksandrov performed frequently and regularly throughout his life. As recollected by his daughter Elena Polenova, the composer was playing the piano until three days before his death.<sup>404</sup> There is only one extant recording of Aleksandrov playing his own piano works. An LP made by the Melodiya label (CM-02105-6) includes miniatures and separate piano cycle movements from various years. Unfortunately, the recording excludes his piano sonatas.

Aleksandrov's playing is remembered by his students and colleagues as very expressive, refined, and poetic. He was known to devote special attention to the sound and the coloristic possibilities of the instrument. Vladimir Bunin recalls, "Aleksandrov's pianism is closely related to the nature of his music with its subtle nuances, spirituality, rich palette of colors, refined *rubato*, precision of phrasing and form, and always noble

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<sup>404</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 158.

sound of the piano.”<sup>405</sup> Bunin also acknowledges Aleksandrov’s approach to performing as a creative process where technique is subordinate to idea, image, and mood.

Such practice resulted in a contemplative and somewhat introspective manner of playing: deeply concentrated, the author never diverged from his calm musical narrative. In line with his playing style, Aleksandrov preferred soft, warm, and subtle sound with singing qualities, rather than the harsh percussive pianism popular during that time. Kokushkin recollects that the composer liked the soft dynamics so much that he practiced with the lid closed, and that the fortissimos in his playing never sounded “thunder-like.”<sup>406</sup>

In the performance of his own works, Aleksandrov chose tempos that are unhurried, with a rare use of *accelerando*. His *rubato* was inspired by vocal music, as it was characterized with prolonging the phrase endings in order to reveal harmonic shifts or emphasize the important sound points within a phrase. The abundant use of such *rubato* could lead to a frequent ritarding of the tempo. To justify the sometimes dragging effect of the performance, Kokushkin parallels Aleksandrov’s tendency to take time in his playing with the staging of Chekhov’s dramas in the Moscow Art Theater, where every pause and phrase has a special meaning.<sup>407</sup>

Kokushkin’s argument notwithstanding, the composer’s way of playing was perceived by some critics as distant and even unemotional, especially when Aleksandrov performed in the same concert with more flamboyant pianists. As pointed out by Vasily Lutsch, Neuhaus’s rendition of Aleksandrov’s Sixth Sonata was more effective than the

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<sup>405</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 184.

<sup>406</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 241.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

composer's, since it was marked by heightened emotionalism, uncharacteristic of Aleksandrov's style.<sup>408</sup> It could be argued that the lack of excitement in the composer's playing partially contributed to the disappearance of his works.

Among other elements of Aleksandrov's pianism are the use of pedal and attention to the polyphonic lines. The composer used pedal abundantly in order to enrich the sound with color and highlight fantastic effects in his music. His use of pedal, however, was very refined, with frequent employment of the half pedal technique.<sup>409</sup> In addition, dry passages were not excluded by the composer, especially in places where the clarity of thought was essential.

The polyphonic layering in Aleksandrov's music, frequently noted during the discussion of his sonatas, shows the importance of linear thinking in his compositions. Peter Deane Roberts, who thoroughly examined the modernistic aspects of Aleksandrov's works, exemplifies how the logical thought in several passages becomes clear only if heard and interpreted in linear terms.<sup>410</sup> Moreover, according to the recollections of Aleksandrov's students, the composer drew special attention to the voice leading and the clarity of all polyphonic lines in his instruction. Vladimir Bunin, for example, recalls that when teaching his Fourteenth Sonata, the composer demanded that every contrapuntal layer in the second variation have its own timbre.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>409</sup> D. B., "An. Aleksandrov and His 'Visions' for Piano, Op. 21," *Soviet Music*, no. 9 (1959): 199.

<sup>410</sup> Roberts, *Modernism in Russian Piano Music: Scriabin, Prokofiev, and Their Russian Contemporaries*, 36.

<sup>411</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma*, 185.

Generally, in pianists' performances of his works, Aleksandrov was looking for sensitivity to musical detail above other elements. This is emphasized by Kokushkin, who states:

The composer was satisfied with expressive and clear interpretation of his works, where the sense of wholeness and the understanding of character naturally combined with subtle communication of detail that enriched his music. Therefore, he cautioned against hurried tempi and exaggerated emphasis on the 'big picture' in the performance.<sup>412</sup>

The careful attention to musical detail is also evident in the numerous expressive markings in the scores that describe the nuances of character, as well as suggest a more accurate interpretation. The abundance of such terms as *flebilmente*, *con iracondia*, *irresolute*, *solenne*, *giubilando*, along with frequent indications of dynamics, phrasing, and tempi, show that Aleksandrov had very specific images in mind when composing and that he was determined to reflect them in the score as precisely as possible. Such detailed guidance suggests that the composer aimed to control the interpretation of his works by not leaving room for the pianist's imagination and originality. Thus, a too strict and overly detailed compliance with the composer's directions may result in a lack of spontaneity and an understated approach, two main flaws in the composer's own performances.

Consequently, the main challenge in performing Aleksandrov's works is to find a compromise between justifying the composer's ideas by closely following his precise instructions and infusing his music with increased emotional power in order to enhance its effect on stage and leave a more powerful impression on the audience.

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<sup>412</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 129.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **DEFINING ALEKSANDROV'S STYLE**

The material discussed in the previous chapters covered an overview of Aleksandrov's biography, examination of the historical context, a study of influences, and presentation of the composer's fourteen piano sonatas, which showed a clear evolution of his style. All of these components comprise a strong basis for investigation into Aleksandrov's individual style. Although some characteristic traits have been mentioned in the preceding chapter, this part of the study is dedicated to organizing these traits in order to bring forth a comprehensive picture of Aleksandrov's compositional makeup.

#### **Essential General Characteristics**

Based on the overview of Aleksandrov's sonatas, it is possible to deduce several essential qualities that are characteristic of the composer's general style. They include lyricism, refinement, and a feeling of optimism.

Lyrical and poetic images are dominant in Aleksandrov's style. They are evident not only in the majority of his themes from the earliest to the latest works, but also in the multiple poetic associations in the form of inscriptions or commentaries. There are several varieties of lyricism that can be observed over the span of his sonatas. Earlier compositions, for example, display Medtner-influenced narrative lyricism and dreamy fairy-tale inspired lyrical images (Sonatas No. 1, 2, 3). In the later pieces, the lyricism

becomes enriched with the images of nature (No. 5, 6, 11) and youthful themes (No. 9). Many slow movement images derive from the lyricism based on Russian folklore (No. 4 – 11, and 14). The largest group, however, may be termed the psychological lyricism, or a reflection of the composer's philosophical views. To various degrees, this type of lyricism is found in all of Aleksandrov's sonatas and most prominently revealed in No. 4 and 10.

Lyricism is distinguished as Aleksandrov's most characteristic trait by many contemporary composers and critics. In 1925, Miaskovsky writes, "He [Aleksandrov] is above all a lyricist. His lyricism is genuine and elegant, dreamy, but never turning into melancholic sensitivity."<sup>413</sup> The strongest testament to Aleksandrov's poetic qualities is illustrated in Beliaev's much-quoted phrase that reads, "If Miaskovsky is a thinker and Feinberg a psychologist, then Aleksandrov is above all a poet."<sup>414</sup> Beliaev's elaboration emphasizes his point, when he continues, "Poeticism is the basic quality of his artistic individuality and his compositions. . . . Aleksandrov is a lyrical poet who combines delicacy and integrity. His lyricism is simple and expressive at the same time."<sup>415</sup> Leonid Sabaneyev, who was generally critical of Aleksandrov's music, staples him as a "typical and exclusive lyricist,"<sup>416</sup> which portrays the composer's lyric tendency as a negative quality, since "typical" in Sabaneyev's context means old-fashioned.

Next to lyricism, another important trait in Aleksandrov's style is the refinement of musical elements, especially form. Attention to structural details and balance of all

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<sup>413</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma*, 242.

<sup>414</sup> Victor Beliaev, "Anatoly Aleksandrov," *Contemporary Music*, no. 12 (1926): 47-48.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Sabaneyev, *Modern Russian Composers*, 233.

components in a composition was noted numerous times in the discussion of his piano sonatas. The composer's concern for polished presentation is also evident in multiple revisions of his own works.

Aleksandrov's trait of meticulous refinement is most likely rooted in some of his personal characteristics. The immaculate order in his home and working place are mentioned in the recollections of several students and colleagues. Kokushkin, who visited the composer's home on many occasions, feels that such tendency toward perfect order was also reflected in Aleksandrov's composition.<sup>417</sup> Another factor that affected Aleksandrov's restless improvement of his pieces was his sense of duty before music. Pianist Victor Bunin explains, "His responsibility for art was absolute. Even when he was creating little things, his attitude was as though he was doing it 'to stand through the centuries.'"<sup>418</sup> Such an attitude resulted in a strong work commitment and self-critical approach, which characterized Aleksandrov's compositional process. His student Tatiana Rodionova recalls her teacher as a perfectionist who upon finishing a piece puts it away for some time in order to return to it with a fresh impression and continue to improve it. He said to her, "When you think that you wrote a good piece, make it even better."<sup>419</sup>

Aleksandrov's tendency toward constant refinement became one of his most noted characteristics. Kokushkin refers to this quality as Aleksandrov's "true gift."<sup>420</sup> Feinberg notes that this trait relates Aleksandrov to the traditions of the classics when he writes, "[Aleksandrov's music] is harmonious and polished, while wisely pacifying the

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<sup>417</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 116.

<sup>418</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 182.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>420</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 31.



conflicts that occur during the composition process. This closely relates his methods to the techniques of Mozart and Chopin.”<sup>421</sup> Miaskovsky and Krein also consider this feature as part of Aleksandrov’s distinct individual style.

Finally, a feeling of optimism is included as one of Aleksandrov’s essential stylistic components. Although it may not seem to be a musical characteristic, but rather a personal trait, an optimistic outlook permeates his compositions. Aleksandrov’s love for life resonated with Lu Andreas-Salome’s poem “Hymn to Life” and found its strongest manifestation in the Second, Fourth, Eighth, and Tenth Piano Sonatas. Kokushkin argues that this poem is the key to understanding the specifics of Aleksandrov’s style, since it contains the central message the composer attempted to convey in most of his music.<sup>422</sup>

Considering the hardships brought by the two world wars and the revolution, it is remarkable that Aleksandrov found so much happiness around him and loved life as much as he did. As evident from his letters, he never ceased to see the goodness in life. This is obvious in a letter to his daughter Elena, for instance, in which he wrote, “Life is good, even with sorrow in it.”<sup>423</sup> In another letter to his wife, Nina, he exclaimed his ardent longing for life in the following words, “Despite my 67 years of age, my desire to live does not diminish, and in my current physical and emotional condition I am ready to live a thousand years.”<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 171.

<sup>422</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 121-22.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

It is important to stress that positive images in Aleksandrov's work are usually contrasted with darker and somewhat cynical characters. Such duality of images is deliberate, as was expressed by the composer:

What is characteristic in my work is that there are two contrasting yet interconnected sources. One of them is the idyll: the positive undisturbed perception of life. The other is the skepticism, irony, and sometimes sarcasm. Skepticism follows the idyll and expresses distrust in the untroubled life and in the notion that one can wholly surrender to happiness. However, the skeptic source never wins in my compositions.<sup>425</sup>

It is clear from Aleksandrov's words that he established the contrast of the idyll and skepticism in order to emphasize the domination of the positive source in his music. Although frequently encountered in his works, such a phenomenon can be best observed in Sonatas No. 3, 7, 8, and 14.

Some researchers may attribute Aleksandrov's feeling of optimism in music as a consequence of political conditions, since the reflection of positive outlook was one of the requirements in the arts during the socialist realism era. After all, as expressed by Vladimir Iokhelson, "Socialist realism is above all a style of profound optimism. The whole historic experience of the proletariat is optimistic in essence. And we can and must affirm that optimism is intended as an obligatory feature of this style, its very essence."<sup>426</sup> However, as seen from Aleksandrov's letters and recollections of his family and colleagues, it is more likely that the composer's feeling of optimism came mainly from his genuine conventions and was only in part affected by the dictated policies.

Optimistic outlook, lyricism, and refined detailing are some of the most essential general characteristics in Aleksandrov's music because they affected his use of the

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<sup>425</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 16.

<sup>426</sup> Maes, *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*, 258.

smaller elements in a composition, such as melody, harmony, texture, and others. As it is examined below, Aleksandrov's treatment of these elements also illustrates his individual style.

### Stylistic Elements

One of the key elements in Aleksandrov's work is **melody**. Overall, the composer considered that the most important components in music are melody and harmony.<sup>427</sup> Besides, in a conversation with colleagues he stated, "A person generally expresses oneself with melody."<sup>428</sup> This statement defines the melodic element as the principal tool for expression in his music.

Most of Aleksandrov's melodies and themes are lyrical in character and display the various types of lyricism listed earlier. Although primarily derived from folk singing tradition, they are frequently full of unusual turns created by subtle alteration of degrees and modal shifts. During the early period, the themes were built from simple short motives based on vocal melodic declamation (No. 1, 2, 3). Gradually, with the evolution of style, the melodies become more cantilena-like and show the influence of folk and mass song intonations (No. 4, 6-9, 14). In addition, some themes incorporate an element of conflict, which plays a major role in the dramatic concept of the composition (No. 3, 11).

The melodic principle frequently affects other elements. For example, tendency toward melodic enrichment is evident in most of rapid figurations. Furthermore, the voice

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<sup>427</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 49-50.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

leading is mainly dictated by the melodic line, as first observed by Beliaev.<sup>429</sup> Kokushkin also finds that Aleksandrov often employs the “melodization” of texture, where the variants of melodic figurations affect the changes in the musical fabric of the piece.<sup>430</sup>

**Harmony**, another major element in Aleksandrov’s music, illustrates his mixed use of traditional and modern elements. While tonal and harmonic organization in Aleksandrov’s compositions stays mainly in the major-minor system, it is often enriched with more contemporary functional relationships (minor second and tritone, for instance) and extensive alteration of scale degrees, which intensifies harmonic tendencies and creates opportunities for sudden modulations.

Aside from major and minor scales, Aleksandrov used other formations, such as octatonic, whole-tone, pentatonic (No. 3, 5, 11), and modal (Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Lydian-Mixolydian). The tonal sphere, however, never seems to be completely abandoned, even when the notational system nearly collapses under the weight of the chromaticism (No. 5).

The chord construction in Aleksandrov’s works is based mainly on a tertian principle, with added half-step suspensions, non-chord tones, and alterations. Such configuration makes familiar structures sound in a new way. Non-tertian chords are not avoided by the composer and include quartal-quintal harmonies, bi-functional and tritone-built chords, as well as polytonal sonorities (No. 5, 11). It appears that less traditional and dissonant chords in Aleksandrov’s compositions serve to create fantastic

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<sup>429</sup> Beliaev, *Anatoli Nikolaevich Aleksandrov*, 13.

<sup>430</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 138.

images and exploit color of sonority rather than bring out the harsh element. Despite the use of modern chords, functional logic is always present in Aleksandrov's music.

Finally, Aleksandrov's harmonic language evolved throughout the years. The harmony in the early compositions was largely influenced by Scriabin, which resulted in the multiple uses of the non-resolved seventh and ninth chords. The tendency toward harmonic sophistication led Aleksandrov to a deeper exploration of chromatic possibilities, which climaxed in the complex intensity of the Fifth Sonata. In the late compositions, however, Aleksandrov returned to the simplicity of triadic structures and modal relationships.

Aleksandrov's use of melodic and harmonic elements constitutes the **textural** aspect of his music. Homophonic in nature, Aleksandrov's texture is largely enriched with polyphonic techniques, such as counterpoint, countermelodies, hidden voices, supporting voices, and accompanying figurations. In addition, fugue, fugato, and canon forms are common in his works (No. 3, 4, 7).

Kokushkin suggests that Aleksandrov's affinity for polyphony was in part influenced by Taneyev's teachings and a general tendency in the twentieth century to resurrect polyphonic traditions.<sup>431</sup> Despite the abundance of the polyphonic techniques in his compositions, Aleksandrov stressed that they are not the essence of his work. He said, "I am always considered a polyphonic composer. But I would not say so. More precisely, in my work polyphony plays a major role."<sup>432</sup> To elaborate, Aleksandrov did not wish to be considered a polyphonic composer to avoid being included in the general tendency;

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>432</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 64.

yet, at the same time, he did not want to reject the importance of polyphony in his compositions.

As with harmony, Aleksandrov's treatment of texture underwent an evolution. The initial texture was based on the tradition of romantic and impressionistic writing. During the 1920s and 1930s, through polyphonic elaboration and harmonic sophistication, the textures thickened, as is most evident in Sonatas No. 4-6. The tendency toward more transparent writing began in the Seventh Sonata and continued through the compositions of the late period, reaching its peak in Sonatas No. 9, 11, and 14.

The organization of musical components in a sonata is another crucial element in Aleksandrov's work. Many researchers, composers, and musicians, such as Feinberg, Miaskovsky, Beliaev, Kokushkin, point out the significance of **form** in Aleksandrov's style. As early as in 1923, Zhilyaev writes that Aleksandrov "handles the sonata form with masterful perfection" and distinguishes it as "the strongest aspect of his talent."<sup>433</sup>

Aleksandrov's treatment of the sonata structure is generally traditional, as the majority of his sonatas (eight of fourteen) display a three-movement plan constructed according to the "fast-slow-fast" principle. The first movements of these sonatas are written almost exclusively in sonata allegro form, the second movements are generally presented in simple or compound triple forms, while the finales most frequently display a rondo-sonata structure.

One-movement schemes are found in the early sonatas, No. 1-3, as well as No. 13, which is a reworked version of No. 1. Such a structure is a descendant of Scriabin and

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<sup>433</sup> Zhilyaev, "Anatoly Aleksandrov and His Third Piano Sonata," 33.

Liszt models. In addition, the two-movement formats in Sonatas No. 5 and No. 14 are modeled after Beethoven's opus 111, where the first movement presents a sonata allegro construction, while the second movement is written in the form of theme and variations.

Unity within the works is achieved by the means of logical tonal development and thematic relationships. Aleksandrov frequently utilized motivic relationships between the themes and manipulated them in the process of development (No. 5, 9, 12). Quite common are the techniques of varying rhythm and texture, such as augmentation, diminution, contrapuntal elaboration, and the enrichment with figuration (No. 8, 10). Thus the development of the thematic material is comparatively traditional.

Along with these familiar methods, Aleksandrov included more unusual procedures in his sonata forms. These include the expanded introduction containing a significant dramatic concept in the Third Sonata, the extended stately codas in Sonatas No. 2-5, 8, and 10, the episodes in development sections in No. 3 and 13, as well as in many finales, recapitulations with new themes in No. 3 and 13. The most innovative structural solutions are found in the Third Sonata, where aside from the expanded introduction, the first theme is stated as a fugato and the development contains an extended *Interludio*; in the Fourth Sonata's second movement, with its compact, yet multi-faceted form; and in the Eleventh Sonata, which combines the elements of one, two, three, and four-movement schemes.

On a smaller scale, the organization of the themes is rounded, balanced, and symmetrical, characteristic of the classical prototype. Although Kokushkin argues that the improvisational manner of expression and the multitude of emotional contrasts distinguish Aleksandrov's work from his predecessors, it appears that the composer

remained more traditional in the area of musical form than in his treatment of other elements.<sup>434</sup>

Fidelity to the traditions of the nineteenth century is also evident in Aleksandrov's use of **rhythm**. Regular accentuation and symmetrical meters predominate in the composer's work; yet Aleksandrov departed from the familiar use of rhythm more often than in his treatment of form. He freely included syncopation, meter changes, polyrhythm, and non-symmetrical structures, as exemplified in the irregular rhythm of the Fifth Sonata, the asymmetrical meters of the Seventh Sonata's *Canzona* and the Twelfth Sonata's finale, and the complex beat divisions of the First and the Thirteenth Sonatas. In addition, rhythmic augmentation is encountered in the First and the Seventh Sonatas. Despite their multiple uses, however, these rhythmic devices never contradict the traditional, but serve to enhance and renew them.

Aleksandrov's **pianistic writing** presents a variety of techniques. Its virtuosic elements include parallel octaves and chords, double notes, unusual figurations, scalar passages, and various arpeggio figurations. However, Aleksandrov's characteristic melodic approach to passages, as well as the predominance of closed hand position technique and transparency of texture, makes his virtuosity closer to Chopin and Scriabin, as opposed to Liszt and Rachmaninov. Next to the established pianistic techniques, Aleksandrov's individual style is evident in the use of unusual figurations based on modern harmonic and modal colors, polyphonically enriched passages, and, particularly, refined texture.

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<sup>434</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 110.



It appears that in his pianism Aleksandrov is drawn to the softer dynamics and the colorful possibilities of the instrument. His attention to the subtle variety of colors in sound and delicate shifts of timbres sometimes results in the misty impressionistic passages. Kokushkin recalls that the composer especially liked blurring half steps with their undefined mixed colors.<sup>435</sup>

More atypical pianism is found in the finale of the Sixth and sections of the Fourth and Fifth Sonatas, where the composer's writing is more angular and modern in style. Such a departure from his regular practice was influenced by Prokofiev's pianism, as well as the generally popular twentieth century tendency toward a percussive treatment of the piano.

Over the course of his work, Aleksandrov's pianistic writing changed. His early sonatas display full sounding structures and multi-layered texture characteristic of Romantic writing. After the Sixth Sonata, textures become more unassuming, simple, and transparent, recalling the classical pianism.

The presence of all the musical elements described above can be summarized using the words of Miaskovsky, who in one statement covered Aleksandrov's individual treatment of melody, harmony, texture, and form, as well as his music's emotional characteristics. Miaskovsky wrote:

His works are already marked with distinct individuality. A refined melodic aspect, full of unusual motives, originally coarse harmony, contrapuntally rich fabric of musical statement, broadly thought out and naturally executed formal structures, and above all this – a touch of dreaminess and refinement with a tendency toward a narrative tone.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>436</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 222.

### Aleksandrov's Individual Style as Related to His Influences

Having discussed the separate elements in Aleksandrov's music, it becomes easier to determine what distinguishes Aleksandrov's music from that of his contemporaries. The strong melodic element in his music, for instance, distinguishes his language from Scriabin's. As noted by Alekseev, "Aleksandrov's themes are different from Scriabin's characteristic pathos, since the latter lacks the singing element in the melody."<sup>437</sup> The composer's affinity for poetic expression and the coloristic possibilities of the sound leads Mazel to the following conclusion, when comparing his work to Medtner's: "Aleksandrov's lyricism is warmer and more direct, his colors are more impressionistic; it breathes more freely and its poetry is more alive. That is why Aleksandrov's music is perceived as more contemporary and thus, is easier to relate to."<sup>438</sup> Furthermore, Alekseev remarks that Aleksandrov's tendency toward simplicity and transparency make his themes "less intense harmonically and less dithyrambic comparing to Medtner's."<sup>439</sup> Finally, his polished structure causes Aleksandrov's music to be more balanced than Feinberg's, according to Kokushkin.<sup>440</sup>

Consequently, the individual aspects of Aleksandrov's style overshadow the derivative ones. As remarked by Beliaev, "The composer's unique artistic nature processes the influences so deeply that it is not easy to notice them."<sup>441</sup> In other words, the variety of musical influences that resulted from well-rounded education and the composer's personal curiosity first blended into Aleksandrov's style and then converted it

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<sup>437</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 36.

<sup>438</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 224.

<sup>439</sup> Alekseev, *Sovetskaya fortepiannaya muzyka, 1917-1945*, 36.

<sup>440</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 238.

<sup>441</sup> Beliaev, *Anatoli Nikolaevich Aleksandrov*, 14.

to form his individual approach to composition. In the words of Boris Pokrovsky, the stage director of the Bolshoi Theater at the time, “Aleksandrov knows music by all, but writes his own.”<sup>442</sup>

### Musicologists on Aleksandrov’s Style

The classification of Aleksandrov’s style has been attempted by several music experts. The review of their studies, which suggest various and often conflicting opinions, reopens the question of Aleksandrov’s stylistic ambiguity that was briefly discussed earlier in the study.

Peter Deane Roberts in his study *Modernism in Russian Piano Music* argues Aleksandrov’s position as a modernist. Drawing on Aleksandrov’s active participation in ACM and his taking the modernists’ side during the 1920s, Roberts focuses his argument around the composer’s Third and Sixth Sonatas and points out a multitude of modern techniques in the areas of tonal and temporal organization. He distinguishes linear style, ostinato principle, delay in defining tonality, modal variability, and scalar use as the examples of modernistic tools for expression.<sup>443</sup>

Despite his ACM involvement, however, the critics of the 1920s did not consider Aleksandrov a progressive composer. Victor Beliaev writes, “Aleksandrov is not a ‘modernist.’ . . . He is by nature a traditionalist, who combines an exceptional musical

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<sup>442</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniia, stat'i, pis'ma*, 203.

<sup>443</sup> Roberts, *Modernism in Russian Piano Music: Scriabin, Prokofiev, and Their Russian Contemporaries*, 36-37, 53, 74, 76.

gifts with independent musical thinking. As traditionalist, Aleksandrov develops, deepens, and refines musical accomplishments; he does not invent or discover them.”<sup>444</sup>

Some more contemporary historians share this view. In 1982, R. Ledenev notes that Aleksandrov’s traditionalism stays above the modern confusion. He writes:

[Aleksandrov’s] work stood aside from the turbulent tendencies in contemporary music, in the center of which was Prokofiev and Shostakovich. . . . Such established musicians as Aleksandrov lived in a set world of the artistic ideals and created their musical values related to the Russian classical tradition in their spirit, manner, and distinct melodism. . . . The basis of his music is a clear peaceful perception of life, without the nervous intensity and agitated emotions.<sup>445</sup>

Yet, even at the end of the twentieth century the opinions regarding Aleksandrov’s style divide among the musicologists. While Calvocoressi bluntly labels him as “very conservative,”<sup>446</sup> Yuri Katz argues that Aleksandrov was ahead of his time in harmony by demonstrating that he, simultaneously with Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Stanchinsky, contributed to the modernization of the diatonic system by enriching it with chromaticism.<sup>447</sup>

At the same time, some historians compromise their view by acknowledging both the progressive and the traditional sides of Aleksandrov’s style. Christoph Flamm remarks that Aleksandrov on one hand defied convention, and on the other, remained loyal to it, when he writes, “In his fourteen piano sonatas . . . Aleksandrov challenged tradition much more powerfully and consistently. . . . Tradition and innovation, and all the

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<sup>444</sup> Victor Beliaev, "Anatoly Aleksandrov," *Contemporary Music*, no. 12 (1926): 47-48.

<sup>445</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 233.

<sup>446</sup> Michel Calvocoressi, *A Survey of Russian Music* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 118.

<sup>447</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 251.

various influences, are very closely interwoven with Aleksandrov.”<sup>448</sup> Likewise, Sitsky claims that Aleksandrov was the follower of Rachmaninov by placing him among the “Reluctant Avant-Gardists;” yet, he notes numerous “excursions into modernism” in Aleksandrov’s music.<sup>449</sup>

Considering the above discussion, it appears that Aleksandrov’s style presents an amalgamation of various and frequently opposing musical tendencies, combining separate elements from traditional and modern musical techniques, as well as the stylistic characteristics of the composer’s leading contemporaries, namely Rachmaninov, Scriabin, Prokofiev, and Medtner.

The pioneer of this thinking was Boris Asafiev, who wrote in 1923, “The composer [Aleksandrov] brilliantly recreates quite various stylistic principles. He follows the path of flexible use of the usual schemes, brilliantly summing up in his material and his manner of composing two extremes: Korsakov-Taneyev precision and clarity with Scriabin excitement.”<sup>450</sup> This view is supported by another composer of the time, Alexander Shenshin. He remarks, “Aleksandrov creatively realizes the connecting point between the established musical traditions and the newly achieved expressive means.”<sup>451</sup>

The idea of stylistic synthesis in Aleksandrov’s work seems to be accepted by the majority of the contemporary critics in Russia, as well as in the West. It can be found in a critical commentary to a recent recording, in which Luca Sabbatini writes that Aleksandrov “created a sort of a synthesis between the worlds of Rachmaninov, Scriabin,

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<sup>448</sup> Christoph Flamm, Liner Notes, *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hamish Milne (piano), Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc.

<sup>449</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 182, 205.

<sup>450</sup> Igor Glebov, “The Future Era of Russian Music,” *To the New Shores*, no. 1 (1923): 11.

<sup>451</sup> Alexander Shenshin, “The New Scores,” no. 2: 69.

and Medtner.”<sup>452</sup> In a more thorough study, Russian historian Kokushkin distinguishes the synthesis of the most stylistic trends in Aleksandrov’s work, including pre-Bach tradition, eighteenth-century Classicism, and nineteenth-century Romanticism, as well as some contemporary tendencies, such as symbolism, impressionism, and neoclassicism.<sup>453</sup> His conclusion regarding Aleksandrov’s style is that his novelty comes through the synthesis of many elements. While Kokushkin states that Aleksandrov is not an innovator, since he does not belong to the group of composers such as Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Bartok, or Stravinsky who had invented new ways of expression, he finds it impossible to call him a passive traditionalist. Kokushkin concludes that Aleksandrov “went through the experimentation, created his personal style, enriched and renewed the best classical traditions;” thus, his novelty lies in the synthesis of the elements around him.<sup>454</sup>

### Criticism

One final issue remains in the study of Aleksandrov’s work and style. Considering his accomplished professional stature, motivating artistic environment, finest available education, his talent, intellect, and perseverance, Aleksandrov’s music had all the requirements for lasting success in the repertoire of performers. Yet it vanished from the concert scene after the 1930s. Examination of aspects that prevented his music from standing the test of time shows several areas of weakness.

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<sup>452</sup> Luca Sabbatini, Liner Notes, *Preludes To a Revolution: Russian Piano Preludes 1905-1922*, Jenny Lin (piano), Hänssler Classic D-71087, 2005, compact disk.

<sup>453</sup> Kokushkin, *Anatoly Aleksandrov*, 233.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

While many prominent critics recognize Aleksandrov as one of the leading and most powerful Russian composers of the 1920s, some criticize his lack of innovation. For example, Sabaneyev finds Aleksandrov to be overly consumed in tradition, which dulled his creativity. He states, “No particular innovations are within the dreams of his creative art severely locked in a world of old traditions among which certain concessions to modern times ring like timid phrases.”<sup>455</sup> In comparing Aleksandrov’s music to that of Miaskovsky, Sabaneyev writes, “[He] has just as little impulse to invent and is just as devoted to the unwritten laws of ‘former music.’” He concluded, “We have no reason to expect anything unusual or anything new from him. According to the standards of Western Europe he is a reactionary academist.”<sup>456</sup>

The majority of criticism, however, concerns not Aleksandrov’s conservatism, but the emotional character of his music. As evident from several reviews and articles, the lack of dramatic temperament was the main deterrent to the popularity of Aleksandrov’s works. Music critic Evgeny Makarov writes in his review, “Aleksandrov’s style lacks any affection and marked dramatism.”<sup>457</sup> Miaskovsky also comments on the non-temperamental character of Aleksandrov’s style, while comparing it to the more daring gestures of Prokofiev and Shostakovich. He states, “His individuality is not distinguished by brilliance and a catastrophically demonic character.”<sup>458</sup> Moreover, Sabaneyev leads as far as suggesting that one has no reaction to Aleksandrov’s music when he distinguishes

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<sup>455</sup> Sabaneyev, *Modern Russian Composers*, 233.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>457</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 298.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

“a certain anemia, the absence of ardent pathos, the rationality of his work which is neither cold nor hot but lukewarm” in his music.<sup>459</sup>

Aleksandrov’s non-dramatic approach was also reflected in his playing, which undoubtedly had an effect on audience’s perception of his music. In 1927 the critic Vasily Lutsch attended the concert of Aleksandrov’s piano works, where both the composer and Heinrich Neuhaus performed the piano sonatas. Lutsch’s review following the concert read, “The author’s [Aleksandrov’s] manner of playing was cold and colorless, with emphasis on the form... Neuhaus played with much more emotion and temperament.”<sup>460</sup> During the same year, another critic, Muzalevsky, found Aleksandrov’s piano works “less impressive,” compared to the composer’s vocal works, and “somewhat at a disadvantage due to author’s pale performance.”<sup>461</sup> Additionally, Kokushkin recalled Aleksandrov’s pianism to be subtle, unhurried, and without exaggerated fortissimos.<sup>462</sup>

Aleksandrov’s lack of fervency can be explained with some of his personal traits and his attitudes toward music. As a person, Aleksandrov was a well-balanced individual with an optimistic outlook on life. Consequently, it would have been uncharacteristic for him to explore the darker and more unsettling corners of existence in his music. He instead chose primarily warm, lyrical, and quiet feelings as his comfortable zone of expression.

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<sup>459</sup> Sabaneyev, *Modern Russian Composers*, 233-34.

<sup>460</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 224.

<sup>461</sup> ? Muzalevsky, "Bloknot Muzykanta," *Zhizn' Iskusstva* 16 (1926): 17.

<sup>462</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 240-41.



It has been previously mentioned that Aleksandrov, inspired by the philosophical readings of Schopenhauer, viewed music as the power standing above all arts.<sup>463</sup> With time, however, Aleksandrov's adoration for music grew beyond life itself, as he stated:

There is nothing more frightening than history, and there is nothing more beautiful than art. But most importantly, art transforms life – it does not distort it, reflect it, not decorate it, but transforms it. . . . Art stands above life. Life is a chaos. Art is order. Life is twilight. Art is light. Life is something unclear and confusing. Art is sincere; it is a world of true reality.<sup>464</sup>

The composer's words reveal the great degree to which he felt that the art of music transcended life. It is natural, then, that Aleksandrov distanced real human emotion from his music. In a conversation with a colleague, he commented on this particular issue, "I compose music, not feelings. . . . Emotional music is only partially true, since emotionalism is only a part of real life. . . . Musical emotion is different, more illusory; it is broader and more meaningful than a real life's emotion."<sup>465</sup>

Logically, Aleksandrov's philosophical outlook led him to obsessive preoccupation with the craft of musical composition. This explains not only his lack of temperament, but also the excess refinement in his work, which resulted in a lack of spontaneity. The latter was observed by several critics, but most acutely by Feinberg, who spoke about Aleksandrov's "precise inspiration." He said, "There are no spontaneous occurrences in Aleksandrov's music; it is built too precisely and delicately. He is one of the rare masters, for whom architecture and development of musical form is

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 216-17.

inseparable from the logic and devotion to the ideas and the emotional meaning of the piece.”<sup>466</sup>

Similar observations regarding Aleksandrov’s preoccupation with arrangement of the musical elements are found in the views of contemporary authors. Flamm notes that the melodic element in Aleksandrov’s music suffered due to the composer’s exaggerated concern for the development of the musical material.<sup>467</sup> Zagryanskaya finds that Aleksandrov’s focus on the wholeness of the musical form obstructed a more impulsive expression of his feelings characteristic of modern musical attitudes.<sup>468</sup>

Thus, Aleksandrov’s lack of temperament is a result of his heightened ideas regarding music’s place in the context of real life, which in turn leads to a meticulous craftsmanship that overshadows the emotional aspect of his music and blocks spontaneous expression.

Finally, there are several historians who suggest that Aleksandrov’s music did not flourish due to the political situation. Soviet musicologist Mikhail Druskin, an advocate for the social realism style in music, claims that Aleksandrov would have been much more experimental if he had not fallen under the influence of Western practices.<sup>469</sup> In contrast, Andrey Olkhovsky suggests that the reason behind the downfall of the composer’s popularity after the 1930s is owing to the actions of the Soviet government, namely the RAPM campaign, who “shot him down” for formalism.<sup>470</sup> Sitsky also blames

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<sup>466</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 171.

<sup>467</sup> Christoph Flamm, Liner Notes, *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hamish Milne (piano), Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc.

<sup>468</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 202.

<sup>469</sup> Druskin, *Istoriya I Sovremennost': Stat'i O Muzyke*, 272.

<sup>470</sup> Olkhovsky, *Music under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art*, 188.

Soviet repression for the lack of progress in Aleksandrov's work. He states, "Aleksandrov seems to have been a composer who never moved far enough. A slow developer, possessed of a fine technique and command over keyboard, he was perhaps too comfortable with what he had acquired early. If repression had not come, he might have pushed further into unknown regions."<sup>471</sup>

Considering the current conditions in the world, when the tensions between the Soviet and the Western authorities are no longer present due to the fall of the socialist power in Russia, the opinions of mid-twentieth century musicologists seem quite outdated. Because of this, it is more compelling to accept Flamm's view on the subject, who urges the broadening of the horizon of music from the Soviet era in order to get an accurate and objective assessment of the music of that time, since it "cannot be judged solely by reference to extremes." He writes, "To judge the music of this era according the degree of its modernity is a failure in methodology that is based on an outmoded belief in progress. . . . The political orientation of the composers and the extent to which they enjoyed freedom is hardly a basis for musical analysis."<sup>472</sup>

To summarize, Aleksandrov's music did not leave a lasting impression in the hearts of the listeners. His distant emotionalism, caused by his personality and philosophical convictions, his uncertain position among traditionalists and modernists, and the political situation in the Soviet Union, all contributed to the disappearance of his works after the 1930s.

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<sup>471</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 209.

<sup>472</sup> Christoph Flamm, Liner Notes, *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hamish Milne (piano), Hyperion CDA67328, 2002, compact disc.

It must be noted that Aleksandrov did not seem concerned about his diminishing popularity. Moreover, he never diverted from his principles. He simply accepted that the essence of his ethical and esthetical ideals did not suit the modern world, and that perhaps it would take a long time before his music was properly valued.<sup>473</sup> Aleksandrov recalled that Medtner once said about his own work, “My music is like a girl who has many good commonly accepted qualities. But she is not pretty; that is why no one is falling in love with her.”<sup>474</sup> In some way, it seems appropriate to parallel these words with Aleksandrov’s music. He did everything correctly; yet, his music did not enjoy a long term relationship with the audience. In 1950, in his posthumously published poem “To the Winner,” Aleksandrov quietly surrendered to his much more successful contemporary Prokofiev, as he wrote:

...My forest will burn out...  
No one will remember me...  
The trout is gone. Its catcher lies in mossy bottom.  
Descend to him from blooming paradise  
And burn his corpse. . .  
Then write your victorious call on his tomb.  
But let that tombstone be shadowed by the pines.  
And let it bear eternal stamp – the trout.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 192.

<sup>474</sup> Blok, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, 71.

<sup>475</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 329.

## CONCLUSION

A study of Anatoly Aleksandrov's life and works uncovers many areas of interest, concerning not only the forgotten piano music written by the composer, but also the complexity of the musical environment in Russia during the first half of the twentieth century. By examining the historical, stylistic, and analytical aspects of Aleksandrov's fourteen piano sonatas, the study contributes to our understanding of the creative processes that took place during the unstable conditions of the Soviet music culture from its formation in the early 1920s until its maturity in the 1970s.

Following the 1917 Revolution, artistic life was marked by young composers' efforts to create a progressive musical culture, meant to reflect the new liberal ideals of a socialist society. This resulted, on one hand, in the stylistic variety of musical techniques, and on the other hand, the conflict of traditionalists and modernists. Both were reflected in Aleksandrov's works, which display such contemporary techniques as dissonant harmony, polyrhythms, coloristic effects, and non-traditional scales, along with more conservative treatments of structure, melody, and pianistic texture. Along with the principles of classicism, his piano sonatas contain stylistic trends of late Romanticism, impressionism, and modernism.

In addition to the historical considerations, the synthesis of various styles in Aleksandrov's work resulted from conflicting influences in his education and the music of his contemporaries. Under the guidance of Taneyev, who based his convictions on the examples of classical traditions, and Zhilyaev, who advocated Scriabin and innovative

music techniques, Aleksandrov entered the professional composition field with a well-rounded foundation, from which he was ready to develop his own style. Close friendship with Medtner played a major role in the formation of Aleksandrov's musical principles. The encounters with Rachmaninov, Shostakovich, and Prokofiev enriched his creative path.

Aleksandrov's personal beliefs to a great degree affected his artistic choices. Largely following his passion and erudite knowledge of philosophy, his convictions compelled him to stay within the realm of traditional principles, rather than the influence of political conditions. One such conviction, the view of music as the power that transcends real life, led the composer to meticulous craftsmanship of every musical element, especially form and thematic development. As a result, the audience found his music to be overly refined and lacking temperament and spontaneity, as stated by critics.

Consequently, Aleksandrov's pieces lost their popularity and almost disappeared from the concert stages. Some historians suggest that it is highly unlikely that these works will be revived. For example, David Fanning writes that Aleksandrov's compositions "fell off the edge [of the repertoire] long ago and may never climb back."<sup>476</sup> Others fight for its survival, like Larry Sitsky, who remarks, "Aleksandrov's music seems unaccountably neglected, given the level of polish and mastery displayed in the scores," and stressed, "His music deserves reinstatement."<sup>477</sup> As evident from the recent studies and recording releases, it appears that the interest in the early Soviet music repertoire is gradually increasing. Among the recordings are Hamish Milne's compact disc of

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<sup>476</sup> David Fanning, review of *Modernism in Russian Piano Music: Skriabin, Prokofiev, and Their Russian Contemporaries*, Peter Deane Roberts, *The Musical Times*, 134, no. 1810 (December 1993): 703.

<sup>477</sup> Sitsky, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900-1929*, 199, 209.

Aleksandrov's piano works<sup>478</sup> and Jenny Lin's collection of *Preludes to the Revolution*,<sup>479</sup> while the most recent study on the subject was done by Amy Nelson in her monograph entitled *Music for the Revolution*.<sup>480</sup>

In the meantime, Anatoly Aleksandrov's work remains dormant for performers, and his life is faintly remembered as a great tribute to the art of music. His unsurpassed dedication and love for music are best illustrated in his own words, as recalled by his daughter Elena Polenova, "If a person did not love music, that person did not live."<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Hamish Milne, pianist. *Piano Music of Anatoly Aleksandrov*, Hyperion CDA67328. CD. 2002.

<sup>479</sup> Jenny Lin, pianist. *Preludes To a Revolution: Russian Piano Preludes 1905-1922*. Hänssler Classic D-71087. CD. 2005.

<sup>480</sup> Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

<sup>481</sup> Blok and Polenova, *A. N. Aleksandrov: Stranitsy iz zhizni i tvorchestva*, 210.

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## Appendix A: Annotated Discography

Aleksandrov, Anatoly Nikolaevich. *Fortepiannyye sonaty* [Piano sonatas]. Moskva: Melodiya (33D-012202), 196?, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm. This recording includes Aleksandrov's Sonata No. 2, performed by Yakov Zak, Sonata No.10, performed by Leonora Iosiovich, and Sonata No. 11, performed by Isaak Mihnovsky. The recording includes Aleksandrov's two works from the genre of piano miniature, namely, Nocturne Op. 3, No. 1, in A major, and Waltz Op. 3, No. 2, in A minor, both of which are performed by Samuil Feinberg.

*Piano Music by Anatoly Alexandrov*. Performed by Hamish Milne (piano). London: Hyperion Records Limited CDA67328, 2002, compact disc. This recording features a number of piano miniatures by Aleksandrov, including *Six Preludes*, *Op. 1*, *Obsession passée*, *Op. 6*, *Three Studies*, *Op. 31*, *Romantic Episodes*, *Op. 88*, *Visions*, *Op. 111*, as well as *Elegy and Waltz*, *Op. 89*. The recording also includes a performance of the Third and the Fourth Piano Sonatas. The insert provides a valuable commentary by Christoph Flamm in three languages, English, French, and German.

*Rarities of Piano Music at 'Schloss vor Husum.'* Danacord DACOCD 489, 1997, compact disc. Track 15 of this recording features Aleksandrov's Piano Sonata No. 2 performed by Yuri Martinov with commentary by Peter Grove.

*Preludes to a Revolution: Russian Piano Preludes 1905-1922*. Performed by Jenny Lin (piano). Hänssler Classic CD 98.480, 2005, compact disc. This recording features Aleksandrov's *Four Preludes*, *Op. 10*, among many piano preludes written by the composer's contemporaries during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The commentary is provided by Luca Sabbatini in German, English, and French.